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101 GREATEST HERITAGE SITES

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WORLD'S NATURAL &
CULTURAL WONDERS



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Our world is a truly incredible place, full of awe-inspiring landmarks and amazing areas of outstanding natural beauty, historical intrigue and cultural significance. While many are well-known around the world, there are others that may not be quite as famous but are no less important. In 1978, UNESCO began putting together a list of World Heritage Sites deemed worthy of legal protection and thought to be of outstanding value to humanity. Over 40 years later, the list stands at more than 1,100 sites from over 160 countries.

In 101 Greatest Heritage Sites, we've selected the very best the world has to offer, from the natural wonders of the Grand Canyon and the Great Barrier Reef to the historical and incredible cultural experiences of the Palace of Versailles, the Forbidden City and Machu Picchu. Turn the page to start learning about these amazing places and begin planning that next trip of a lifetime.

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DISCLAIMER : The Coronavirus pandemic has had a dramatic impact on global travel. As such, the locations, activities and websites mentioned within may no longer be available or appropriate. Always check the current travel guidelines when planning a trip, and adhere to any local restrictions. With ongoing conflicts and humanitarian crises, it's also important to check the latest foreign travel advice for your destination. Readers rely on any information at their sole risk, and this book, and its publisher, Future Publishing Ltd, limit their liability to the fullest extent permitted by law.

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The facade of the Palace of Westminster is nearly 300m (980ft) long

PALACE OF WESTMINSTER

A STUNNING BUILDING THAT'S BEEN THE LAVISH DOMAIN OF THE POWERFUL FOR MANY CENTURIES

Built on the north bank of the River Thames, the Palace of Westminster and Westminster Abbey (situated to its west) is not only a majestic coupling of London icons but a site of great national importance. It is within the palace where the United Kingdom's laws are made and where the future of the country is determined. Westminster Abbey, meanwhile, is a place of daily worship where numerous British monarchs have been crowned, married and buried.

The Palace of Westminster emerged from the rubble of the medieval Old Palace during a complex rebuilding project that began in 1840 and lasted more than 30 years. The original building had been destroyed in the Great Fire of 1834, leaving only a few parts intact, including Westminster Hall with its large wooden roof. This had been saved, in part, by a change of wind as much as the efforts of the many firefighters tasked with putting out the flames. What emerged from the ruins, however, was nothing short of spectacular.

The result of that endeavour is what you see today: a fine building designed by architect Charles Barry in the Gothic Revival style. A Royal Commission had been appointed almost immediately and it determined that the new building should be either Gothic or Elizabethan.

Other surviving parts of the Old Palace, such as the Undercroft Chapel and the Cloisters of St Stephen's, were also incorporated, with the total cost of the rebuild topping £2 million (more than £240 million in today's money).

The Palace of Westminster was built from a sand-coloured limestone quarried in South Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire, and became home to the green-decorated House of Commons and the lavish red House of Lords. While these are the most famous spaces in the building, there are actually more than 1,100 rooms set around courtyards. Aside from two post offices, a gym, hairdressers and bars, there are many offices for politicians. Art collections are also stored within the palace walls and include rich murals and portraits of royalty and notable parliamentarians.

Most of the documents are kept on shelves across the 12 floors of Victoria Tower, atop which the Union Flag flies (unless the monarch is inside the building, at which point the Royal Standard flutters instead). Designed to be a fireproof repository, Victoria is the tallest of the palace's three main towers and stands at 98.5 metres (323 feet). Completed in 1860, it also features the Sovereign's Entrance, which is used by the monarch during the State Opening of Parliament.



A beautiful cloister corridor with stone floor and arched ceiling in Westminster Abbey



Windows on the world: the Palace of Westminster truly is a marvel of Gothic design

Westminster Abbey is formally titled the Collegiate Church of St Peter at Westminster



“EACH OF THE FOUR CLOCK FACES IS SEVEN METRES IN DIAMETER AND MADE UP OF 324 PIECES OF GLASS”

Standing just a couple of metres shorter than Victoria Tower is Elizabeth Tower, which is most commonly known as Big Ben. Big Ben is actually the largest of its five bells, most likely named in honour of the First Commissioner for Works, Sir Benjamin Hall. The Tower contains 11 floors, with 334 steps leading up to the belfry. The four clock faces are seven metres (23 feet) in diameter and each made up of 324 pieces of pot opal glass. Accurate to within a second, the bells chimed for the first time on 11 July 1859.

The shortest tower is Central Tower. Designed to serve as a ventilating chimney for stale air and smoke from fireplaces, it's also the only one with a spire. It shows an attention to detail that is replicated inside the palace, where there are 4,000 stained glass windows, allowing light to shine on a seductive array of carved doors, Gothic Revival artworks, colonnades of golden sculptures and frescoed walls. It could be said they are without equal. And yet, as mentioned, the magnificent Westminster Abbey is next door.

Initially developed on the site of a 7th century church by Edward the Confessor more than 1,000 years ago and rebuilt in an Anglo-French Gothic Style by King Henry III in 1245, the abbey enjoys the status of Royal Peculiar, which makes it a church responsible directly to the Sovereign. Its first coronation was that of William the Conqueror in 1066 and it has also hosted 16 royal weddings while acting as the place of burial or commemoration of more than 3,300 people including Charles Dickens,

Sir Isaac Newton and the Unknown Warrior – a British soldier whose body was brought back from France in 1920.

Westminster Abbey is certainly striking from the outside but there is arguably even greater beauty within its heart. For example, the late medieval architecture of Lady Chapel, built from 1503 to 1516, is awe-inspiring with its fan-vaulted ceiling and 95 statues of saints around the walls. It also has high stained-glass windows depicting soldiers who fought in the Great War and there are carved misericords beneath the hinged seats of the stalls.

In 2013, new stained-glass windows were unveiled in the abbey to replace those shattered by a Second World War bomb. They incorporate stars and lilies, which are linked to royalty and are emblems of the Virgin Mary. The Abbey is also home to what is understood to be Britain's oldest door, dating back to 1050, and there are many stunning wall paintings, including those within Chapter House that depict scenes from the Book of Revelation.

It's little wonder that UNESCO declared the site to be of 'great historic and symbolic significance' and the stories it can tell are infused in every brick. Both the Palace of Westminster and Westminster Abbey are a link to Britain's past, yet they continue to play a part in its present and future. Indeed, Big Ben's chimes, when they begin again following years of conservation works, will once again be a ringing endorsement of all that is great here.

LOCATION London, England

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1987

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (ii), (iv)

TOP TIP Tours of the Palace of Westminster are available: www.parliament.uk/visiting/visiting-and-tours/tours-of-parliament.

THE CHURCH OF SAINT MARGARET



When naming the Palace of Westminster and Westminster Abbey as a World Heritage Site, UNESCO also included the medieval St Margaret's Church. Founded by Benedictine monks in the 12th century, it was intended to be a place where locals could worship, the idea being that they wouldn't disrupt the monks at the abbey.

Initially created in a Romanesque style, the church was rebuilt between 1482 and 1523 by the King's Master-Mason Robert Stowell and it is this that we see today, albeit with a reconstructed northwest tower that was completed in 1738. Eastern and western porches have also been added and, from 1614 to 1972, St Margaret's was the parish church of the House of Commons.

There are many highlights for visitors, including the burial place of Sir Walter Raleigh, the abundant use of the portcullis symbol and the striking stained-glass windows. It was in this church that Winston Churchill married Clementine Hozier when he was President of the Board of Trade in 1908, and he led Members of Parliament there after the Second World War for a thanksgiving service.

The pretty village of Geiranger, population 250, nestles at the end of Geirangerfjord



NORWEGIAN FJORDS

PLUNGE INTO THE BREATHTAKING SCENERY OF THE WORLD'S FINEST COASTLINE

According to *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, the fjords of the Norwegian coast are so spectacular that their designer won an award. It might be a work of fiction, but Douglas Adams was surely correct that Norway has the world's most impressive coastline.

The plunging sides of the inlets that snake inland from the Norwegian Sea were created over millennia by glaciers that carved the bedrock, leaving behind valleys that were flooded with seawater. World Heritage-listed Geirangerfjord and Nærøfjord are two of the finest among thousands. Geirangerfjord is a 15-kilometre (nine-mile) branch that leaves Sunnysfjorden, which itself separates from Storfjorden, while 17-kilometre (10.6-mile) Nærøfjord is a side arm from Sognefjord.

The most popular way to see the fjords is from the water; there is perhaps no finer way to drink in the scenery than while drinking a cocktail aboard a cruise liner, although be aware that bigger isn't always better – the mighty behemoths operated by some cruise lines cannot reach as far into the fjords as some of the smaller vessels. An alternative to cruise ships would be the hour-long ferry between Geiranger and Hellsøylt that is as full of eager sightseers as it is lucky locals for whom the stunning landscape is just part of the daily commute.

Among the highlights on a trip through the fjords are beautiful waterfalls including Geirangerfjord's two falls facing each other across the water; the Suitor is said to be trying to woo the Seven Sisters opposite. Abandoned goat farms can be spotted perched amid the

rock faces and the tiny village of Bakka in Nærøfjord boasts one of the most photogenic churches imaginable.

This is great hiking country, too, with many signed trails to choose from, including a spectacular metal stairway that climbs up the side of the Storfossen waterfall. Anybody who makes it to the top of the mountains and gazes across the Norwegian fjords from an elevation of 1,400 metres (4,600 feet) can only agree with Douglas Adams that this is indeed an award-winning coastline.

LOCATION Norway

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 2005

TYPE OF SITE Natural

CRITERIA (vii), (viii)

TOP TIP Set an alarm; most cruise ships enter the fjords in the early hours.



The steep-sided fjords were carved by glaciers with the bottom up to 500 metres (1,640 feet) underwater

THE ALHAMBRA

SPAIN'S STUNNING MOORISH PALACE AND ITS EYE-CATCHING ISLAMIC ART WILL TRANSPORT YOU BACK IN TIME

LOCATION Granada, Spain

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1984

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (iii), (iv)

TOP TIP Buy your tickets in advance online – or be prepared to queue up for them overnight.

your trip you'll need to plan carefully. Be sure to buy your tickets in advance, as they only sell a few hundred tickets on the door each day – and people will queue up overnight to grab them. Your ticket specifies an entry time for the Nasrid palaces, but you are free to wander around the rest of the complex at your leisure.

Once you've made your way past the entrance gates, you'll find yourself in the Generalife Gardens, inspired by the paradise gardens of Persia. You'll discover a huge variety of colourful flowers, flowing water features and shady spots under fruit trees, and you could spend hours here – but you'll have to tear yourself away to visit the palaces themselves.

To see how the Christian kings tried to outshine their Arab predecessors, visit the Palace of Carlos V – though it's worth noting you can only explore the inner courtyard. This is a perfect circle, reminiscent of Spain's famous bullrings.

When your time comes, cross over the threshold into the Nasrid palaces, which include the famous Court of the Lions. Look out for gorgeous Arabesque patterns in the doorways all around the palace – the delight is in the detail. Stained glass gives the palace a burst of colour when it catches the light, and if you look out, you'll see yet more colourful gardens below.

For a taste of the Alhambra's original purpose, clamber along the battlements of the Alcazaba, an Arab fort built over Roman ruins. When you reach the top, survey the Sierra Nevada mountains, the Alhambra complex and the city of Granada from your vantage point – you'll soon understand why this place has been prized by generals, kings and sultans for centuries.

For the best view of the Alhambra, go to Mirador de San Nicolás in Albaicín



Known for its perfectly Instagrammable gardens, intricate geometric archways and bright-blue fountains, the Alhambra in the Andalusian city of Granada is one of Europe's finest examples of Islamic art and architecture. But the Alhambra doesn't just offer one castle – it has three.

What began life as a Roman mountain fortress would be completely transformed by the Moorish Nasrid dynasty, whose roots were in what is now Saudi Arabia. The 12th-century ruler Muhammad I of Granada saw the old Roman fortification's potential, and rebuilt it to overlook the city.

His successors continued his work and added a palace fit for a king – or a sultan. The complex design also included a marketplace,

public baths, offices and workshops, essentially making it a city within a city. Decorated floor to ceiling with delicate patterns, Arabic calligraphy and white marble, the Alhambra's Nasrid Palace and its gardens were also kitted out with the latest technology, including an irrigation system for the Generalife Gardens.

But after the re-Christianisation of Spain in 1492, the new Catholic kings and queens built their own palace on the site, to overshadow the one built by the nation's former Muslim rulers. The Palace of Carlos V's classic Renaissance styling contrasts starkly with the Nasrid buildings, but somehow it works.

The old city of Granada and the Alhambra absolutely must be seen by anyone travelling in southern Spain, but to make the most of

DUBROVNIK



CROATIA'S STUNNING SEAPORT IS WORTHY OF ITS WORLD-FAMOUS REPUTATION

With its combination of history, culture and coastal scenery, it's no wonder the walled city of Dubrovnik has become a popular choice for European holidays in recent years. Located on the Dalmatian coast, it was damaged during the seven-month siege of 1991, but sensitive reconstruction between 1996 and 1999 brought the old city and its gorgeous Gothic, Baroque and Renaissance buildings back to life.

You can take in the whole city at once from Srd, a 412-metre (1,352-foot) hill that overlooks Dubrovnik and provides unbeatable views of the Old Town, the island of Lokrum and the Elafiti Islands. But only by getting up close can you see this splendid World Heritage Site at its best.

Indeed, walking around Dubrovnik, along its iconic city walls, provides some of the best views of the Old Town, as well as stunning panoramas of the azure-tinted Adriatic Sea. The first of Dubrovnik's city walls were constructed in the 9th century, with defences being fortified in the 14th century, and forts added to protect against attacks soon after. These fortresses can be observed as you walk the walls, and you can gain

access to Fort Lovrijenac, one of the city's most fascinating fortresses and a recognisable filming location from the TV drama *Game of Thrones*.

Access to the city walls is granted via historic gates, including the main fortified entrance to Old Town, Pile, with its stone drawbridge. Once through, take the time to enjoy the circular Large Onofrio's Fountain, which spews drinkable water from the mouths of 16 ornately carved masks. Then it's on to the rest of the sights, made easy by a small Old Town and historic centre.

There are some beautiful squares with an abundance of notable buildings, such as the 16th-century Sponza Palace, home to the city's archives. Lively Prijeko Street is also peppered with old houses and narrow stepped offshoots. Other historic sights include the Rector's Palace, a building dating back to the 14th century that doubles as a cultural history museum, as well as the City Guard building with its preserved Baroque facade. You should also visit the Franciscan Church and Monastery, a large complex on Dubrovnik's main street,

the Placa, close to the Pile Gate and next to the Church of Holy Savior. It houses a 14th-century pharmacy as well as a library and, with earthquakes and war to contend with over the years, it's rich in history as well as stature.

In fact, it feels as if you're absorbing history and heritage at every turn, from the gate of Ploče in the east, to the abundance of churches, palaces and monasteries. It's not called the Pearl of the Adriatic for nothing, that's for sure.

LOCATION Croatia

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1979

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (iii), (iv)

TOP TIP Buy a Dubrovnik Card for free access to many popular attractions, including the city walls.

Dubrovnik's well-preserved Old Town joined the UNESCO World Heritage Site list in 1979



STONEHENGE



EXPLORE ONE OF BRITAIN'S OLDEST MYSTERIES NESTLED IN THE HEART OF WILTSHIRE

It's one of the most recognisable landmarks in Britain, but no one really knows how it came to be. If you're driving down the A303 just north of Salisbury, the circle of stones in a field by a busy main road may not look like much. But that's where you'd be mistaken.

Those stones have been there for at least 3,500 years, their age just part of their appeal to tourists. The mystery is probably the reason why it's visited by thousands each year. As the years have gone by, stones have disappeared and the landscape itself has changed, so we've had to make some guesses as to what the henge was used for. Two stones are named for their purpose – altar and, somewhat sinisterly, sacrifice – but the significance of the others is not so clear. Some even have little swords and axes carved on them but again, we don't really know why.

You can walk the whole way round the stones, and audio guides are available for those

who are interested in a more in-depth history of the henge, but there's more to do at the site. Take the chance to visit the 360-degree view from Standing in the Stones in the visitor centre to see what Stonehenge is like through the seasons. It's also a chance to see the winter and summer solstices, although you can experience those for real every year.

The solstice celebrations are one of the only times that you can get up close and personal with the stones instead of simply walking around them, and thousands of people are usually in attendance to see the Sun rise on the longest day of the year in the summer and the shortest day in the winter. Naturally, it's the summer solstice that attracts the most people, who watch the Sun rise behind the Heel Stone, the ancient entrance to the stone circle. You'll also see modern pagans and druids performing rituals and celebrations when the first rays of light hit the centre of

Stonehenge, and the sunrise itself is beautiful to watch.

There's also a Stonehenge exhibition that's home to more than 250 archaeological artefacts, as well as the chance to step inside replica Neolithic houses, which will give you an insight into how people lived 4,000 years ago when Stonehenge was being constructed. It's an opportunity to see crafts of the time taking place, like flint knapping, making rope out of rushes, and grinding grain with a quern and a rider.

If you want to explore the ancient landscape further, you're more than welcome to do so. The Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site is home to another set of stones – the Avebury henge – and you can explore the area by foot or get the shuttle bus direct.

So if you're able to visit one of Britain's oldest archaeological sites, see if you can piece together some of the mysteries.

LOCATION Wiltshire, England

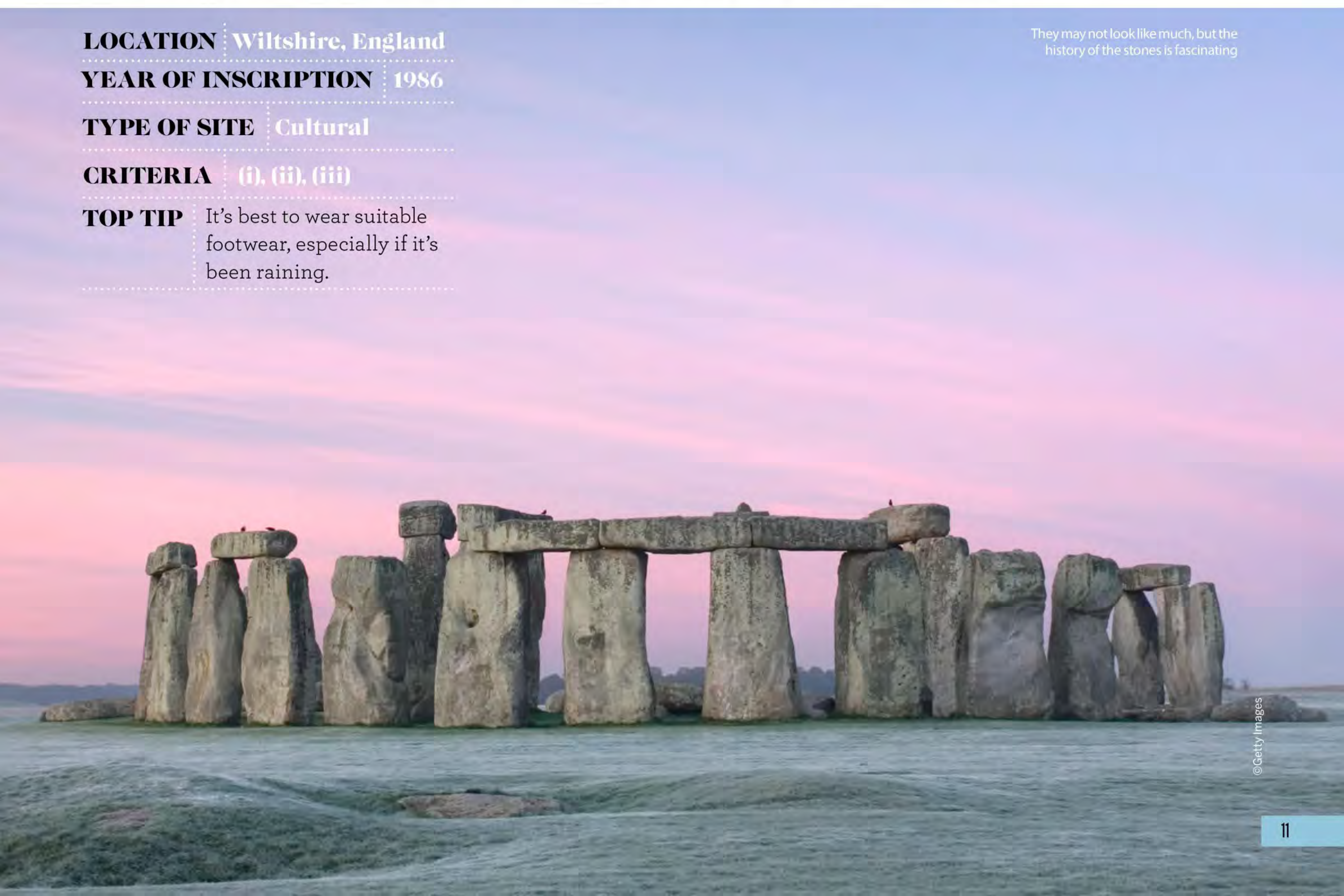
YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1986

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (ii), (iii)

TOP TIP It's best to wear suitable footwear, especially if it's been raining.

They may not look like much, but the history of the stones is fascinating



ROME

VISIT THE STUNNING CAPITAL OF ITALY AND EXPERIENCE A PART OF HISTORY

Italy's capital will take you on a journey into the past, allowing you to explore a host of ancient ruins in a city that established itself as the heart of the vast Roman Empire from 753 BCE to 476 CE. Said to have been founded by Romulus and Remus, few cities have as much heritage and history as Rome which is why, following its inscription as a World Heritage Site in 1980, it was extended out a decade later to the walls of Urban VIII.

If you are to journey here, then you can begin your day with a trip to the Colosseum, before taking a walk through the Roman Forum and on to the Pantheon – structures which turned the heads of UNESCO along with the Mausoleums of Hadrian and Augustus and Trajan's Column. The Colosseum is certainly a spectacle not to be missed – it's the largest amphitheatre ever built, holding between 50,000 and 80,000 spectators, and it remains an icon of Imperial Rome.

Constructed from 72 CE during the reign of Emperor Vespasian, it opened eight years later and became a key part of Roman life. Gladiators would fight to the death and the arena would be flooded with water for mock sea battles. As such, it was at the centre of Roman

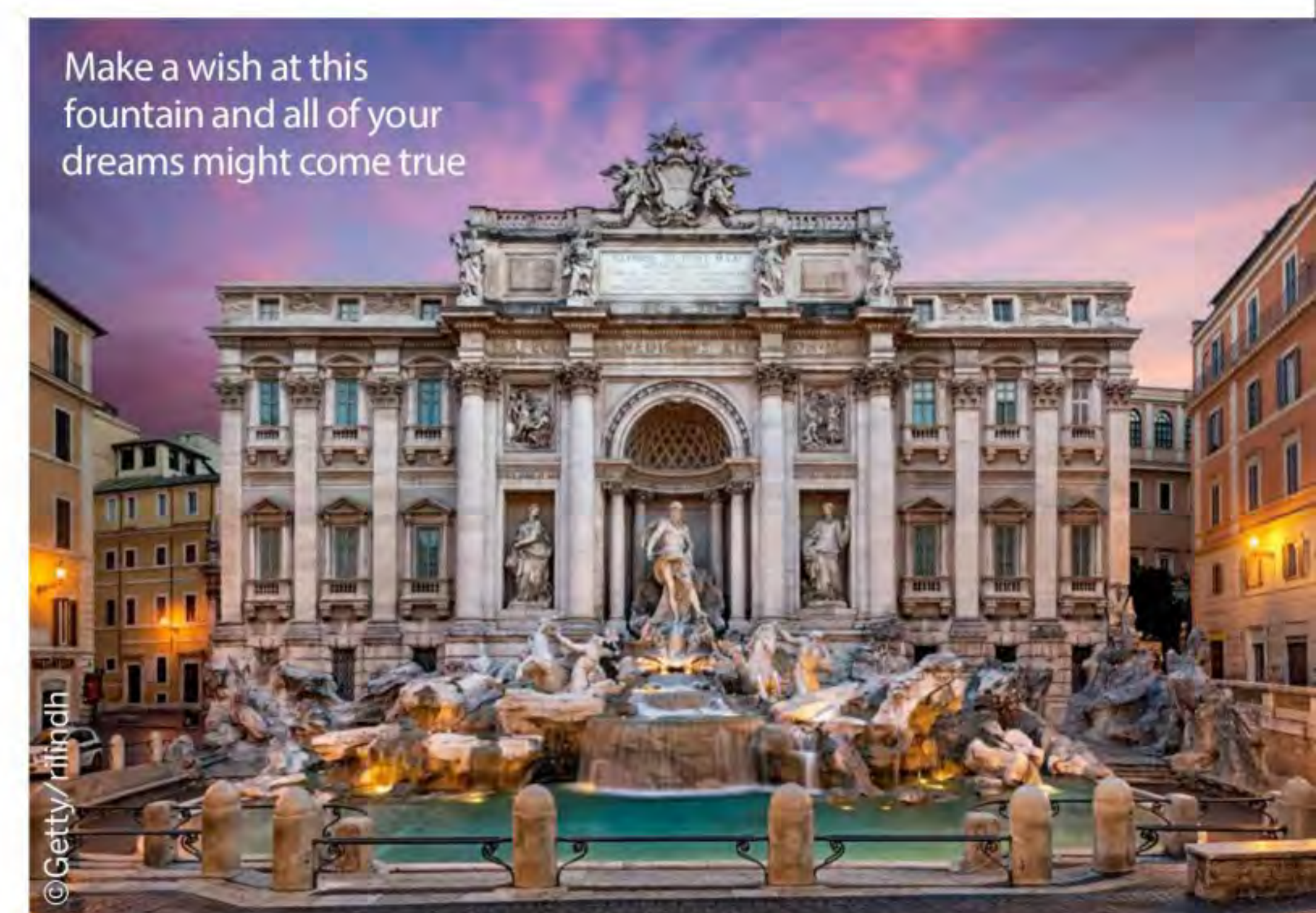
entertainment, with UNESCO declaring it a "monument of antiquity". Restoration work has maintained its authenticity.

Nearby, the Roman Forum is another iconic landmark of the Roman Empire, noted again for its antiquity as well as being a significant civil monument. It's filled with temples, squares and old government buildings on a site that you can explore alone or as part of a tour to learn about the interesting history. Then there is the Pantheon – a 2,000-year-old temple and the best preserved of all of Rome's ancient monuments. It is one of the most influential buildings in the Western world. Venturing through its large, bronze doors and into the largest unreinforced concrete dome ever built is probably as awe-inspiring and breathtaking as it was when it was first constructed. Despite its age, it's still as stunning as ever.

Vatican City, the independent city-state, is the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church and it stands as a reminder of Rome's evolution into the spiritual capital of the Christian world. The popes have, over the centuries, made their mark on the city and a trip to the Vatican should be left for a day when you have nothing else

planned, as there is a lot to see. It's home to St Peter's Basilica and the Vatican Museums, which contain artistic masterpieces such as Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescoes.

The religious and public buildings of Papal Rome are also included in the World Heritage Site and, indeed, the Vatican is by far the city's most popular tourist destination. UNESCO draws attention to its collection of artistic and architectural masterpieces and it specifically mentions St Peter's Basilica, the church which



Make a wish at this fountain and all of your dreams might come true

LOCATION | Italy

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION | 1980

TYPE OF SITE | Cultural

CRITERIA | (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), (vi)

TOP TIP | Watch out for pickpockets, especially around busy piazzas and packed tourist destinations.



You can't move in Rome without a picture-perfect vista in your sights



Take a wander around the old government buildings of ancient Rome

“MAKE A WISH BY THROWING A COIN IN USING YOUR RIGHT HAND OVER YOUR LEFT SHOULDER”

was built in the Renaissance style, topped by a striking dome, and believed to be the burial site of Saint Peter. The Papal Audience takes place on Wednesdays when the Pope is in Rome and, in the warmer months, this is often held in the large plaza in front of the Basilica, St Peter's Square. If you plan on visiting, then dress appropriately – no bare knees, midribs or shoulders on show.

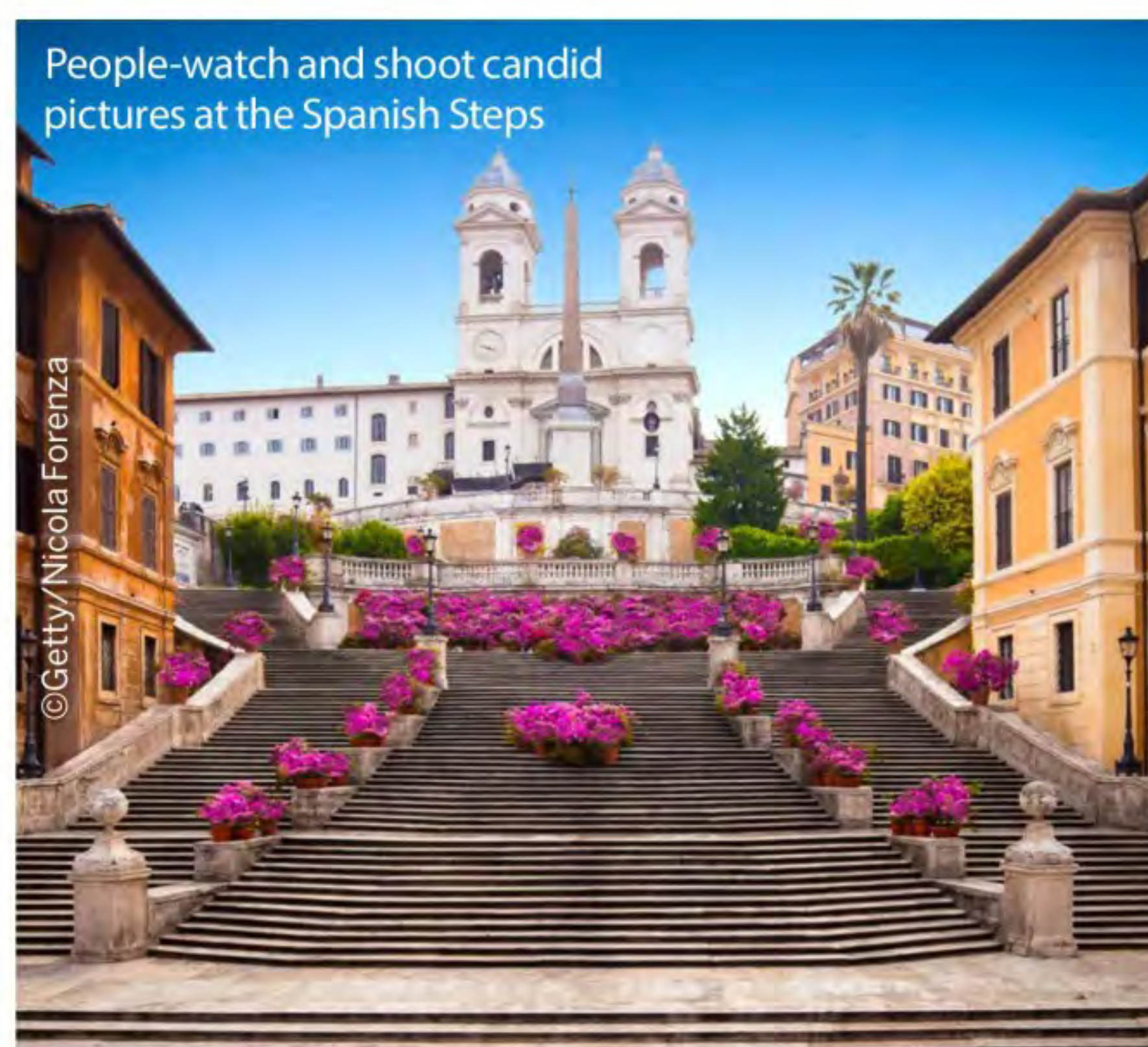
Elsewhere, the most popular square in Rome, Piazza Navona, shouldn't be left off your itinerary. The ornate fountain, Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi (or Fountain of the Four Rivers), has been sitting at its centre since 1651 providing a source of water and acting as a monument to papal patrons. Another piazza not to forget about is Piazza di Spagna, which is where the city's famous Spanish Steps are. It's a central meeting place for both locals and tourists, and a great place for people watching and candid photography.

In the evening, take a romantic walk to the famous Trevi Fountain, and make a wish by throwing a coin in using your right hand over your left shoulder – a tradition at the fountain. Standing 26 metres (85 feet) tall and 49 metres (161 feet) wide, it is the largest Baroque fountain in the city. The water systems which include the aqueducts, drainage and flood walls, together with the squares, churches, palaces and classical buildings are all of note in that they have influenced architecture over millennia. The changing face of Rome and its ability to move with the times provide many points of historical reference from the Baroque to the Renaissance. They can provide much food for thought as you reflect on the heritage of Rome over a delicious Italian coffee or a gorgeous gelato.



You could spend a whole day exploring the Vatican City and its beautiful art

©Getty/Gregor Schuster



People-watch and shoot candid pictures at the Spanish Steps

©Getty/Nicola Forenza



The Colosseum, one of the most iconic sights of Rome



A trip to the ancient city is not complete without a visit here

THE SISTINE CHAPEL

Visit the official residence of the Pope situated in the Apostolic Palace. The stunning chapel was originally called Cappella Magna and was named after Pope Sixtus IV, who restored it between 1477 and 1480. You can book tickets in advance in order to skip the queues and secure entry into an often-sold-out venue. It's located within the Vatican Museums, and access to the Sistine Chapel is included with your museum tickets. The Sistine Chapel is the last room you'll visit on your trip through the museums and the 54 galleries. They truly leave the best until last on this tour. It's absolutely stunning and very memorable.

©Getty/Images

THE GIANT'S CAUSEWAY

NORTHERN IRELAND'S
TOP ATTRACTION IS
STEEPED IN LEGEND

LOCATION Northern Ireland

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1986

TYPE OF SITE Natural

CRITERIA (vii), (viii)

TOP TIP It's best to pick a dry day to visit, as the stones become very slippery when wet.

As the sun rises over Northern Ireland, the view from one area of the north coast is nothing short of stunning. With the rays bouncing off the Atlantic Ocean, standing on one of the three outcrops of volcanic rock, frozen in perfect hexagonal columns, it seems as though time has stopped. With just the sound of the water lapping at the shore, it's more tranquil than anything you could imagine. It could be the setting of a myth – and in fact it is.

Legend has it that the Causeway was created by giant Finn McCool as he threw rocks into the water to cross to Scotland and teach another giant, Benandonner, a lesson. Things didn't exactly go Finn's way, and as he scarpered back to Ireland, he destroyed some of the rocks so that Benandonner couldn't follow him. However, the truth is far less tense – the rocky crops are 60 million-year-old pieces of lava that cooled into more than 40,000 interlocking basalt columns, creating something that's breathtaking and awesome in equal measure. And you can climb all over them, all the way out so you can almost touch the ocean – although this isn't advisable on the rare occasion of very strong winds, as there is no barrier between you and the water.

It's easy to see why the Giant's Causeway became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1986. Northern Ireland's only attraction to make the list, it holds a lot of geological value and has been venerated in both science and the arts over the years. There's more to see than just those outcrops, though. Perhaps most famous is the Wishing Chair, a natural throne created by the basalt columns, and there's also Finn McCool's camel. Local folklore claims it was the only steed that could carry the giant; it's also made of lava that is millions of years old.



The Giant's Causeway stretches out into the Atlantic Ocean

If walking is more your thing, there are a few paths, like Shepherd's Steps, that take you up the cliff face, past the Organ Pipes and towards an eight-kilometre (five-mile) path that stretches along the picturesque north coast. You can use this route to visit the ruins of Dunseverick Castle to the east, and on a clear day, you can see over the water to Islay, the southernmost island in Scotland's Hebrides chain. The coastline itself is nothing short of

stunning – taking a stroll should be high on your list of priorities.

There's a pub a short walk away from the visitor centre called The Nook that offers a true taste of Ulster. The visitor centre itself also hosts a cafe, as well as being home to a small exhibition about the Causeway with interactive activities for children. There really is something for everyone here, and it's all just waiting to be discovered.

The beauty of Mont-Saint-Michel endures today



MONT-SAINT-MICHEL

CLIMB THE HEAVENLY HEIGHTS OF THE ICONIC COASTAL HOLY MOUNT

Rising above the seawater at the mouth of the Couesnon River, a tall abbey spire sits atop a granite tidal island, its buildings crammed together behind stout ramparts as though they fear toppling off the rock. The majestic Mont-Saint-Michel is a medieval masterpiece, a Benedictine abbey begun in the 8th century after the archangel Michael appeared in a vision to instruct the local bishop to build a church in his honour.

Over the next few centuries the abbey grew in wealth and importance and its Romanesque church expanded, its transept cross perched precariously atop the peak of the mount. Crypts and chapels were dug into the rock to allow the structure above to stand, while a village to service the monks' needs filled every spare space on the island. Pilgrims flocked to the abbey despite the ever-present threat of war across the English Channel, perhaps soothed by the strong walls that withstood several sieges during the Hundred Years' War. Those same walls kept people inside during the mount's later life, when it became a 19th-century prison.

Mont-Saint-Michel's fabulous architecture and stunning position off the Normandy coast make it a popular tourist destination

with around three million people exploring its nooks and crannies every year. The medieval designers didn't build it with modern visitors in mind, so expect plenty of thigh-burn from the steep and narrow cobblestone path and countless stairs leading to the abbey. Take a breather from the climb by stopping off to explore the ramparts, in particular the Terrasse de l'Ouest with wonderful views across the bay, and the parish church of Saint-Pierre. Obtain energy for the climb at La Mère Poulard, the omelettes at which are supposed to be the best in the world.

The popularity of the mount's medieval grandeur does come at a price. Visitor car parks have been moved more than two kilometres (1.5 miles) from the island to preserve the landscape as much as possible, while the narrow paths can become crowded. However, the worst of the congestion can be avoided by staying the night in one of the island's hotels or in the local area. Early risers not only share Mont-Saint-Michel with few other tourists, they also benefit from the best light to take the kind of photos that send Instagram into a spin. Whether you brave the crowds or seek the quieter hours, magical Mont-Saint-Michel still has an aura of the Middle Ages.

LOCATION Normandy, France

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1979

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (iii), (vi)

TOP TIP Check the tide times if walking the island's perimeter, since the water rises quickly.



The cloister garden at Mont-Saint-Michel sits at the top of the hill and was started in the 13th century

©Getty images

101 WORLD'S GREATEST HERITAGE SITES

The best views of the Acropolis can be found in rooftop bars and restaurants in the Thissio, Monastiraki or Plaka neighbourhoods

ACROPOLIS OF ATHENS

GREECE'S MODERN CITY OF ATHENS STILL BEATS AROUND ITS ANCIENT HEART, AS ALL ROADS LEAD TO THE ACROPOLIS



It was the place where Athenians came to worship their city's goddess, Athena. It was also a thriving hub for trade, the military and even democracy. The Acropolis of Athens is so much more than the breathtaking Parthenon, but it's a good place to start. Built in the 5th century BCE, the Parthenon temple once contained a gigantic statue of Athena herself, where worshippers would come to lay gifts and sacrifices at her feet. The temple has decayed significantly since then, and it has been hit by a few Ottoman and Venetian cannonballs, but what remains is as stunning now as it was back then.

To get to this world-famous landmark, take the metro to Akropoli station. Inside the station, there are replicas of the Parthenon Marbles, and even some archaeological finds to admire. Get out and walk towards the southern entrance to the Acropolis, as opposed to the main entrance, as the queues are considerably shorter there. It's also the best place to start – on your way up to the top of the hill, you'll pass by extensive remains of ancient Athens, where people really lived. On the way, there's the Theatre of Dionysus, a stoa, and the awesome Odeon of Herodes Atticus, which is still in use as an arts venue.

When you have ascended the steps and passed under the imposing propylaea, you'll be greeted with a view of the iconic Parthenon – the moment you've been waiting for. But before you head straight over there, it's worth having a peek at the Athena Nike temple, which is remarkably well preserved for its age. Explore the edges of the great Parthenon and marvel at the ancient genius who built it, and listen to the wind rushing through the pillars.

Take a moment to turn away from the ancient stuff, and look into the modern-day city. The Acropolis is one of the highest points for miles around, so you should be able to see as far as the port of Piraeus, nearly ten kilometres (six miles) away. You can also spot the Greek Parliament, the Temple of Olympian Zeus and more ancient monuments close by. Notice how all the city's main streets lead towards you – despite being 2,500 years old, this monument is still at the centre of Athenian life.

Before you descend the hill to return to the modern, be sure to admire the Erechtheion, which features intricate and impressive pillars of Greek women. One of these was taken by Lord Elgin to decorate his home in Scotland, and it can now be seen in the British Museum.

LOCATION Greece

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1987

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), (vi)

TOP TIP Buy the combination ticket so you can see other ancient sites, too.

To make the most of your Acropolis experience, the new Acropolis Museum, which was opened in 2009, is a must. Built to house every single artefact found on the hill and surrounding area, you'll find many archaeological wonders, such as colourful statues and pottery. Modern technology helps you to imagine what the Acropolis was once like in its heyday. However, the museum remains at the centre of a controversy concerning the return of the Parthenon (or Elgin) Marbles from Britain to Greece, with UNESCO even offering to mediate between the Greek and British governments in 2014.

KOTOR

MEDIEVAL CITYSCAPES AND A BEAUTIFUL BAY ARE WAITING TO BE EXPLORED

The heritage site of Kotor encompasses a dreamy natural harbour on the Adriatic coast of Montenegro. Made up of two interlinked bays that are framed by mountains rising on all sides, the landscape is certainly beautiful, but it's considered unique because of its historic value – think well-preserved medieval walls, winding streets, fortifications, Romanesque buildings and religious houses.

The entire site of Kotor is around 14,600 square kilometres (5,637 square miles), and it was listed in 1979 in recognition of its cultural worth. Kotor itself is a fortified city, displaying incredible works of Venetian defences that were originally built between the 15th and 17th centuries. These structures have all been very well preserved or restored, and appear today much as they would have done when they were originally erected.

The wider region of Kotor is home to a unique gathering of historic towns on the coast, but the city of Kotor itself is the most popular. You can't visit Kotor without

meandering through the Old Town, which is famous for its many monuments, cathedrals, churches, narrow streets and hidden markets.

Significant historical monuments to spot include the clock tower – which is situated at the main gate and the first thing you'll see when you enter the Old Town – plus the impressive Cathedral of Sveti Tripun (Saint Tryphon) and Napoleon's Theatre. The Maritime Museum provides an equally fascinating (if not small) display of weaponry and model ships over two floors, and is worth visiting if you need some relief from the midday sun.

Kotor is special because it gathers so many original monuments in one original setting against the Mediterranean landscape, but other small towns such as Perast are worthy of exploration, too. The recognisable Our Lady of the Rocks is an island and church set off the mainland, popular with tourists and accessible only by boat. Speedboat tours depart regularly from Kotor to Perast, and you can anticipate

LOCATION Republic of Montenegro

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1979

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (ii), (iii), (iv)

TOP TIP Take a speedboat tour to experience the Our Lady of the Rocks island.

panoramic views of the Bay of Kotor during the ten-minute journey.

Whether you enjoy stepping back in time or al fresco days in the sun, it's easy to see why Kotor is such a popular destination. Walking tours vary from one hour to a whole day – and there's also a sightseeing bus – so it's very easy to make sure you don't miss any of the key medieval offerings.

©Alamy

The Bay of Kotor offers the perfect mix of fascinating history and natural beauty



THINGVELLIR

ICELAND'S WILD NATURE AND RICH HISTORY COME TOGETHER WHERE TWO CONTINENTS MEET



Öxarárfoss waterfall flows down in Almannagjá on its way to the lake Thingvallavatn

Thingvellir is not only Iceland's oldest national park; it's also at the centre of its vivid history, ranging all the way back to 930 CE. At the foot of the Almannagjá, a path between two jagged cliff faces, the country's – and the world's – first democratic parliament sat for the first time in the summer of 930, less than 60 years after the Norse discovered this large island in the middle of the North Atlantic. Even after the Old Pact of 1262, where Norway assumed control of Iceland, Althingi continued to convene every year until the end of the 18th

century. When Althingi was restored in 1844, its venue was moved to the country's capital, Reykjavik, 45 kilometres (28 miles) away.

Thingvellir has religious significance for Icelanders too, as it was here where Iceland formally switched from Nordic Paganism to Christianity in 1000 CE. Unlike most neighbouring countries, it did so without any bloodshed, and today Thingvellir is considered to be a religious home for both faiths, which live in harmony with each other in the country to this day.

LOCATION Iceland

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 2004

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (iii), (vi)

TOP TIP Take in the stunning surroundings from atop Almannagjá.



Gulfoss, easily Iceland's most famous waterfall, plunges in two stages at an angle to each other



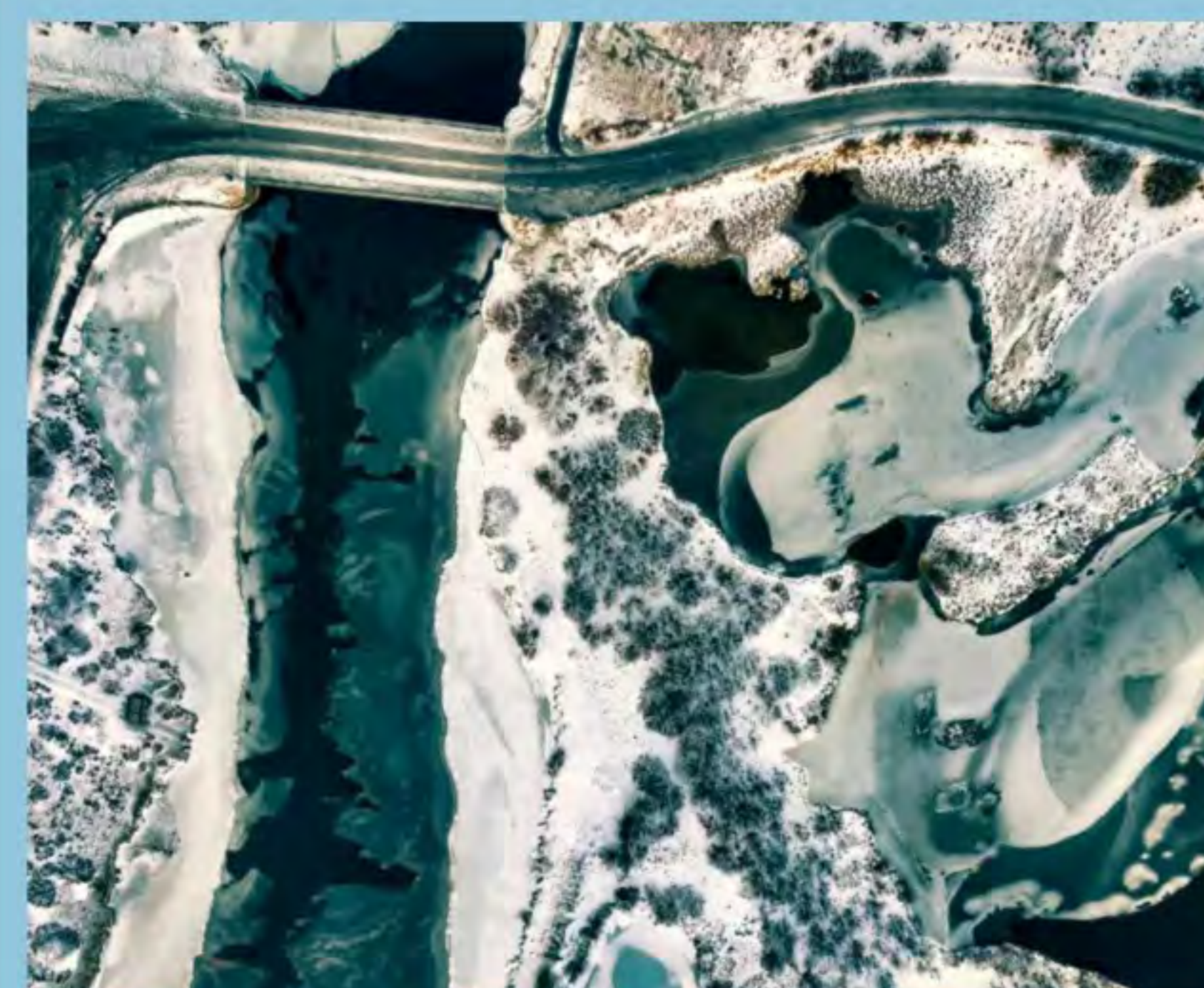
“IT WAS HERE THAT ICELAND SWITCHED FROM PAGANISM TO CHRISTIANITY”

The river Öxará flows over the cliff via the beautiful Öxarárfoss waterfall, which flows through Almannagjá and into Thingvallavatn, Iceland's largest natural lake at 84 square kilometres (32 square miles).

In one of the many fissures you'll find Silfra, filled with astonishingly clear water. It has become such a popular location for divers and snorkelers that visitor numbers at it are now limited to ensure safety, meaning you'll have to pre-book before taking a dip there.

Due to its cultural significance to Icelandic history, a national park was founded in 1930 to protect its nature and preserve it for its rich history. In 2004, it was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and is one of the country's most popular tourist destinations today. Concerns have been raised due to the volume of tourists and their effect on the park's delicate nature, but in recent years, investment in paths, viewing platforms and non-destructive access to the park have done much to allay those fears.

The park itself is a natural marvel, where the aforementioned Almannagjá offers visitors the opportunity to walk inside the rift between two tectonic plates, the Eurasian and North American ones. Iceland marks one of only a few spots on the globe where Mid-Atlantic ridge, the longest mountain ridge on Earth, emerges from the Atlantic Ocean, and here in Thingvellir it takes on an impressive form, as a sharp cliff juts dramatically out of the low hills and surrounding shrubbery before continuing on into the Icelandic highlands to the north.



Öxará river running through Almannagjá in winter

DUCK THE CROWDS

The allure of Iceland's untouched nature has led to a drastic increase in tourism. This is especially apparent at Thingvellir, one of the country's most popular destinations. For some, the crowded scenes at Thingvellir have impacted the experience and satisfaction of a visit to this beautiful place. However, the way around this is to avoid the peak summer months and instead travel in winter or early spring. While you won't see green shrubbery or long summer nights, the stark beauty of Thingvellir in winter – especially if covered in a blanket of snow – is second to none.

JUNGFRAU-ALETSCHE

WHERE THE CHOCOLATE-BOX IMAGE OF THE SWISS ALPS BECOMES A REALITY



The spectacular Finsteraarhorn is the tallest mountain in the Jungfrau-Aletsch protected area

Located in the southwest of Switzerland, the 823 square kilometres (318 square miles) of spectacular natural beauty that compose the Jungfrau-Aletsch protected area make real the idealised vision of pristine alpine beauty that we have come to associate with Switzerland's mountain ranges.

The region takes its name from two of the area's most impressive landmarks. The 4,158-metre (13,642-foot) Jungfrau mountain, while not the tallest in the area (that honour goes to the 4,270-metre (14,009-foot) Finsteraarhorn), is a dominating site, sat alongside the Eiger and Mönch, forming an awe-inspiring mountain wall. The 'Aletsch' portion of the name refers to the glistening 23-kilometre (14-mile) long Aletsch Glacier, the largest in the Alps.

This incredible area of natural beauty is left largely untouched, save for the winding trails and mountain huts dotted among its valleys and peaks, offering a place to rest for hikers trekking through this incomparable landscape. The region is surprisingly diverse, offering snow-capped peaks, rocky scrub, mountain lakes, pine forests, and green meadows. The area owes its diversity of flora and fauna in part to its location. The mountains' southern slopes, exposed as they are to warmer temperatures, give that landscape more of a Mediterranean

feel, in stark contrast to the alpine flowers and forests that you'll find on the other side.

While this is, of course, a great place for mountaineers to visit, you don't have to be a veteran climber to enjoy the area. There are plenty of accessible hiking trails through which to explore the area. If you want to get up high without becoming a mountaineer, there's also the Jungfrau Railway. The Jungfrau line takes you to the Jungfraujoch, a saddle connecting the Jungfrau and Mönch peaks. You will arrive via the highest railway station in Europe, at a height of 3,454 metres (11,332 feet) to be treated to some incredible panoramic views of the surrounding landscape. You can also find railways and cable cars that will take you to other spectacular viewpoints, such as the Moosfluh, Bettmerhorn and Eggishorn. In that sense, the area is surprisingly accommodating to tourists, despite being a near-untouched landscape.

Nevertheless, it is Jungfrau-Aletsch's pristine environment that makes it such an important site and necessitates its protection. Walking through its green alpine meadows and pine forests, stopping off at picturesque huts, taking in its stunning lakes – all against the dramatic backdrop of mountains peaks – is the best way to experience this area of natural beauty.



The idyllic picture-postcard sights you can expect to see while hiking in the region

LOCATION | Switzerland

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION | 2001

TYPE OF SITE | Natural

CRITERIA | (vii), (viii), (ix)

TOP TIP | The Anenhütte is a great location for a day's hike, offering great food and spectacular views.



METEORA

MAKE YOUR OWN PILGRIMAGE TO GREECE'S SPELLBINDING MONASTERIES OF METEORA

Greece is well known for its plethora of monasteries, churches and other religious sites, often built in inaccessible places such as mountaintops and rocky islets out to sea. But none of these test their visitors' devotion more than the monasteries of Meteora, a city in the sky, where six working monasteries cling to the edge of rock pillars for dear life.

Religious folk, including monks, nuns and even hermits have inhabited this remote part of Greece since the days of early Christianity, but the threat of invasion forced them to retreat up the mountain. Eventually, their buildings were constructed on teetering rock pillars, or at the edges of sheer cliffs, in order to ensure maximum inaccessibility.

At its height of popularity, 24 religious sites operated in the Meteora mountains, but today only six remain. All six are open to the public, at the bargain price of just three Euros each. Inside, you can enjoy ancient frescoes that still shimmer in the light, painstakingly painted chapels, well-kept gardens, and even some ingenious technology to help make the monks' lives on the rocks a little easier.

The monasteries are in a beautiful setting, surrounded by dramatic mountains, a vast plateau, and woodlands filled with nature. It's a popular spot for hiking, and many take the tree-lined path from the valley floor up to the monasteries, finding it a rewarding experience.

But, if you don't fancy clambering uphill in the searing Greek sunshine, there is a road that takes you to the entrance of all the open monasteries. Once you get there, be prepared to ascend (and descend) hundreds of steps, cross bridges over steep drops, or go through dark and narrow caves to get into the sanctuary of the complex.

Each monastery has different opening hours, and some are closed on certain days, so before you go it's essential to check this information and plan your route accordingly.

Most visitors start with Great Meteoron, the largest and most famous monastery. As well as the standard chapel, garden, museum and courtyard, you can step inside the monastery kitchen, where monks prepared their food and wine. A little deeper into the complex you'll find something far creepier – an ossuary, filled with skulls and bones of monks who once lived and died in Great Meteoron.

A little way downhill is Varlaam Monastery, with its beautiful architecture and stunning viewpoints, including a shaded pavilion that looks over the edge of the mountain.

If you go to Meteora, you're guaranteed a great view, whichever monastery you're exploring

LOCATION | Greece

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION | 1988

TYPE OF SITE | Cultural

CRITERIA | (i), (ii), (iv), (v), (vii)

TOP TIP | Men and women must cover everything, except their heads and forearms.

Then, if you're a film buff, it's certainly worth the difficult trek to Agia Triada, which was used as the villain's headquarters in the Bond film *For Your Eyes Only*.

Next, you can visit the two convents, Rousanou and Agios Stefanos – the latter of which has been recently restored to its former glory. End your day at the bottom of the valley with Nikolaos Anapafsas, one of the hardest

to reach but from its courtyard you can see the eerie remains of abandoned monasteries precariously perched on surrounding rocks.

At the end of your long day, you'll want to sit down, and there's no better way to relax than watching the sun go down over the monasteries. Along the road, there are a number of viewpoints you can catch this spectacular sundown.

VALLETTA

MALTA'S SUN-BAKED CAPITAL MIGHT BE TINY, BUT IT PACKS IN MORE THAN 600 YEARS' WORTH OF HISTORY



The walls, battlements and cannons that guard Valletta's Grand Harbour are steeped in history

The sandstone streets, brightly coloured bay windows and spectacular domed churches of Valletta make for a very photogenic city, but take a closer look and you'll discover Valletta's fascinating history. This one-kilometre by 600-metre wide settlement on the Mediterranean island of Malta was built by the Order of Saint John, Malta's crusading occupiers. It's since been added to by the French, the British, and now the Maltese themselves.

Sailing into Valletta, the first thing you'll notice is the silver rotunda of the Basilica of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, which stands atop the hilly city. Go inside, and you'll be presented with a dazzling white spectacle, dressed from head to foot in shining lights and decorative statues. A bit further down the hill is the Anglican St Paul's Pro-Cathedral, which competes with Mount Carmel for the title of Valletta's tallest building. Not to be confused with St John's Co-Cathedral, a 16th-century church with an interior that's dripping in gold.

The plethora of opulent churches in such a small space might give you the impression that Valletta's builders were devout and peaceful, but make no mistake – this is a city of war. The walls, battlements and cannons that guard Valletta's Grand Harbour have fended off the Ottomans, Italians and even the Nazis. Today, if you visit the city at 12 noon, you'll hear a loud bang rip through the air. This is the cannon

salute, which takes place daily in the Upper Barrakka Gardens. The best vantage point, though, is from the Lower Barrakka Gardens – it's much quieter, and on some days, cannons from across the harbour fire (blanks) back.

Stroll back inland to St George's Square, the centrepiece of which is the Grandmaster's Palace. This once housed the Grand Master of the Order of Saint John, who ruled the island between 1530 and 1798. It continues to be the seat of the president of Malta, and as you might expect, it's a grand building indeed – the Tapestry Hall and Throne Room in particular. The latter has a series of paintings telling the story of the 1565 Great Siege of Malta, in which the Order of Saint John (together with a few hardy Maltese citizens) defeated a far larger Ottoman invading party.

Experience modern Maltese life in all its forms by strolling through Valletta's narrow streets. Look up to see its wrought-iron balconies, fragrant climbing plants, and flags aplenty. Perhaps the most unique facet of Maltese streets are the nicca – crevices of large buildings, which have been filled with Christian imagery and statues. Finish your Valletta visit by watching a French opera at the partially destroyed Opera House, sip a Kinnie (herbal orange soda) on the seafront, and tuck in to a plate of fresh Italian pasta. Malta might be a melting pot of influences, but they all add up to make one incredible city.

LOCATION Malta

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1980

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (vi)

TOP TIP Keep a stash of 10-Euro notes, because you will need them to enter many of the churches.



The streets of Valletta are colourful and beautiful – and hilly!

HADRIAN'S WALL

ROME'S FINAL FRONTIER TRULY IS A SIGHT TO BEHOLD WITH STUNNING LANDSCAPES AND THOUSANDS OF YEARS OF HISTORY

Stretched across the north of England, running from coast to coast, lies a wall. Running for more than 117 kilometres (73 miles), it was once the northernmost border of the greatest civilisation in antiquity, separating the Romans from the wild Pictish clans; now it's home to trails, ruined forts and dramatic views that are just waiting to be explored.

Hadrian's Wall, named for the Roman emperor who ordered its construction in the 2nd century CE, spans Northumberland, Cumbria and Tyne and Wear, and each site offers a unique chance to find out what life was really like on the Roman frontier. Head to Housesteads near Hexham in Northumberland to explore one of Britain's most complete Roman forts – including the oldest toilets you'll probably ever see – or make your way to nearby Corbridge Roman Town, which was home to a lively community right up until the Roman withdrawal from Britain at the beginning of the 5th century. At the latter, you'll

be able to see the Corbridge Hoard – full of armour, weapons and even writing – first-hand at the museum, before wandering through Corbridge's ancient streets.

The sites along Hadrian's Wall are owned by English Heritage, and as such some ask for small entrance fees, but there are also some free ones. Greenhead, for instance, provides the perfect place to take in the ancient wall as it rolls over the dramatic landscape of northern England. Open during daylight hours, it's well worth a trip if you're in the area.

For those who like a good walk, English Heritage has curated some routes, such as the Birdoswald Trail and Chesters Trail, and they're all packed full of history and wonder. Park your car at a fort and walk along the ancient border, taking in the milecastles, ruins and spectacular countryside as you go – just remember to wear a pair of sturdy walking shoes!

But there's much more to do than just walk along the wall; events are regularly held for

LOCATION Northern England

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1987

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (iii), (iv)

TOP TIP Make sure you wear sturdy walking boots, even if you're just visiting one of the sites.

families, enabling children to get hands-on with the past. Kids can learn how to be a Roman soldier, or they can uncover the secrets behind the excavations that brought us the famous Vindolanda tablets and so much more. Ticket prices will usually include entrance to the site that's hosting them too, so you can be sure of a fantastic family day out.



Take a walk through rugged, ancient landscapes

PALACE OF VERSAILLES

EXPLORE THE MAGNIFICENT PALATIAL COMPLEX THAT FRANCE'S CELEBRATED 'SUN KING' CALLED HOME



The palace was transformed by King Louis XIV from a hunting lodge to the impressive complex that stands today

In a country swarming with castles, fortresses and stately homes, the Palace of Versailles is the crown jewel in an extraordinary collection. It may not be the oldest of France's hundreds of châteaux, nor the most beautiful – it's not even the largest – but Versailles is without a doubt the most impressive, with its significant historical links and remarkably preserved gardens and interior.

Famously the seat of France's Ancien Régime ('old order'), the Palace of Versailles has come to symbolise centuries of absolute power wielded by the kings of France. In spite of war, revolution and bloodshed, the palace has survived almost perfectly intact, while other links to France's royal legacy have eventually been destroyed or fallen into irreparable ruin.

Initially a hunting lodge built by Louis XIII in 1624, his son Louis XIV saw promise in the rural retreat 19 kilometres (12 miles) from Paris, and envisioned an entirely new seat of royal power there – a place where he could express his God-given right to rule, his power and his total authority. In 1661, Louis XIV entrusted Louis Le Vau, Charles Le Brun and André Le Nôtre to

“A SPRAWLING PALATIAL COMPLEX MADE UP OF PALACES, PARKLAND AND GARDENS”

transform the humble château into a sprawling palatial complex made up of palaces, parkland and gardens.

More than two decades after building work began, Louis XIV uprooted the royal court and government to Versailles, insisting that his nobles and courtiers follow him to his vast estate. Here, in the territory he had so obviously marked as his own, Louis XIV demanded loyalty from his subjects. Suspicious of France's power-hungry aristocracy, Louis brought the entire court under his watchful eye, and relied on an intricate web of spies to report on any intrigues and schemes. At Versailles, nobody was safe from prying ears and dangerous rumours, and as quickly as their favour had been found, it could be crushed.

Over his 72-year reign, Louis XIV had secured stability among his people, including

the aristocracy. This Grand Siècle began to erode, however, with the Sun King's successor, Louis XV, who sowed the seeds of the French Revolution with his scandal-ridden reign. After a 15-year rule plagued with hostility and discontent, Louis XVI and his ill-fated wife, Marie Antoinette, were frogmarched out of Versailles in 1789, never to set foot in the palace again. So ended Versailles' time as a royal residence, and it was turned into a national museum in the wake of the former King Louis XVI's execution in 1793.

What remains today is a remarkably preserved reminder of France's most bloody but significant period of history. While many contemporary artefacts housed in the palace were destroyed or sold (there were no fewer than 17,182 auction lots of former royal furniture), and any symbol of the French

LOCATION France**YEAR OF INSCRIPTION** 1979**TYPE OF SITE** Cultural**CRITERIA** (i), (ii), (vi)

TOP TIP Be sure to wear comfortable walking shoes, and pack layers regardless of weather – the palace corridors are notoriously draughty.

monarchy – notably the fleur-de-lys – were removed from the building's façade, it is still a faithful example of Louis XIV's original palace, albeit with renovations and additions from various inhabitants over the centuries.

With around 2,300 rooms inside, there's plenty for visitors to experience inside the palace, including the royal apartments. Perhaps the most famous of the palace's rooms, however, is the Hall of Mirrors, which features floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the exceptional palace gardens and park. On the opposite wall are matching mirrors, and this room was occasionally used to hold events, including balls and diplomatic receptions. The Gallery of Battles, created by

King Louis Philippe in 1837, depicts France's greatest military successes, and is a must-see. The Royal Opera is another significant stop, having been the venue of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette's inauspicious wedding.

In addition to the palace, the complex is home to gardens, a sprawling park and the Trianon Estate, a regal retreat used by the monarchs to escape the courtly demands of palace life. The gardens include spectacular lawns, parterres, fountains, statues and an orangery, and are free to explore on days when there are no fountain shows scheduled (check the website for the schedule). Along the 1,670-metre-long (5,479-foot-long) canal, you'll find the park (a vast wilderness with paths) and lakes dotted throughout. Nestled within the park, you'll find the Trianon Estate. The Grand Trianon was famously Louis XIV's favoured retreat, while the Petit Trianon was gifted to Marie Antoinette, who struggled with courtly life in the palace. Nearby, you'll also find the Queen's Hamlet, a quaint Normandy village-style setup where Marie Antoinette's children were educated.

With so much to see at Versailles, many visitors will find that one day simply isn't enough time to explore the treasures hidden across the estate. Make the most of the two-day Passport ticket, starting at €25 (£21/\$29), which will give you access to the entire estate over the course of two consecutive days.

COPYCAT CHÂTEAU

To many, Versailles doesn't hold a candle to the châteaux of the Loire Valley, but one particular man was so smitten with its founder that he was determined to re-create it in his own country.

King Ludwig II of Bavaria – also known as the 'Mad King' – was determined to create an homage to King Louis XIV, and work on Schloss Herrenchiemsee began in 1878.

Although several rooms were completed, including the State Bedchamber and the replica of the Hall of Mirrors, just like his other building projects – including the famous fairy-tale Neuschwanstein Castle – the palace remained incomplete at the time of Ludwig's death in 1885.



Schloss Herrenchiemsee was built on an island

© Getty Images: Alamy

The Hall of Mirrors – without a doubt the most famous room of the palace – pays tribute to France's artistic and political successes



RHINE GORGE

ROMANTIC CASTLES LINE THE BANKS OF A RIVER OVERFLOWING WITH HISTORY

The Rhine Valley is known worldwide for its beauty and cultural richness. The specific area of the Rhine that's been designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its cultural importance is the Upper Middle Rhine Valley, a 65-kilometre (40-mile) stretch that runs through the ancient Celtic town of Bingen, the wine-making town of Rüdesheim and the history-rich Koblenz.

Following the Rhine river, this stretch takes you through deep gorges and pretty valleys. When you reach Oberwesel, the character of the landscape changes as the river flows through a series of hard sandstone narrows. The most famous is the Lorelei, where a 132-metre (433-foot) rock rises from the banks of the river. The landmark is a rich source of myth and legend, with stories of cave dwelling dwarves inhabiting the rocks and, later, the myth of the Lorelei, a siren distracting sailors with her beautiful voice and causing them to crash into rocks.

The region's natural beauty is complemented by constructed features. Vineyards lining the steep slopes of its valley are a familiar sight and the 60 small towns in the area are rich with stunning historical architecture. Bacharach, for example, is home to old timber-framed buildings, including the Altes Haus, or 'old house', which dates to 1368, and the towering St Peter's Church.

The region's importance as a trading route, which goes back to prehistoric times, has left an indelible mark on the area, one example being the 40-odd castles and fortresses dotted across its landscape. These range from romantic ruins to well-preserved examples of medieval life. They include the 12th century Stahleck Castle; Rheinstein Castle, which boasts a working drawbridge; the uniquely picturesque island castle that is Pfalzgrafenstein Castle; and Marksburg Castle, the home of the German Castles Association. If you wanted to plan a visit to the area around

these incredible castles, it's worth considering the Rhine Castles Trail, a hiking path that begins at the Mouse Tower in Bingen and will take you past roughly 20 castles as part of a 200-kilometre (124-mile) trek to Koblenz.

It is the combination of natural beauty, history and architecture that led UNESCO to designate this area a place of cultural significance, one that it argues has influenced poets, painters, composers and other artists. It will inspire you too.



The unique Pfalzgrafenstein Castle is built on a small island in the middle of the Rhine



A trip along the Rhine takes in castles, gorges, valleys, caves, vineyards and historical architecture

LOCATION Rhine Valley, Germany

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 2002

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (iv), (v)

TOP TIP A day pass is available that enables you to hop on and off boats that tour along the Rhine.



MOSTAR

EXPLORE A CITY THAT HAS LONG BRIDGED THE DIVIDE BETWEEN CULTURES, RELIGIONS AND EMPIRES, BUT NOT WITHOUT PICKING UP A FEW SCARS ALONG THE WAY...

Those with a passion for architecture will be blown away by the diverse influences in Mostar

ying between two continents, the Balkans were destined to be a melting pot where East meets West. Few places has this fusion been as harmonious than in Mostar, though the bustling town today belies a turbulent not-so-distant past.

This multicultural city is celebrated for its diverse architectural influences, which include medieval, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian, in addition to its multi-faith liberalism. But without a doubt, its most enduring symbol is the Stari Most ('Old Bridge'); indeed, Mostar even takes its name from the mostari ('bridge keepers') who once patrolled the traffic passing through the town.

Construction on the iconic single-arched stone bridge finished in 1566 when the region formed a frontier of the Ottoman Empire. The innovative project, replacing what had been a rickety wooden bridge, was the crowning glory of civil engineer Mimar Hajrudin – an apprentice of the great Ottoman architect Mimar Sinan, whose other pupils had a hand in the Taj Mahal and Istanbul's Blue Mosque.

Traversing the Neretva River some 20 metres (65 feet) below, Stari Most has long symbolised unison. However, after standing proud for more than four centuries, its downfall came in the 1990s when the Bosnian War took a huge toll

across the country. Thankfully, investment from UNESCO in the early 2000s saw Stari Most, along with much of the surrounding central zone, restored to its former glory.

Enjoy a drink overlooking the bridge from one of the many terraced bars and restaurants clinging to the vertiginous banks of the Neretva. If you're lucky, you might catch a daredevil from the local diving team taking a plunge from the bridge – a tradition (and badge of honour) for more than 450 years. Tourists are permitted to make their own leap of faith, but beware of the risks and be sure to get a lesson from the Mostar Diving Club first; it's €10 (£8.50) for a (shorter) practice jump and €20 (£17) for the jump proper.

One of the towers on the bridge houses a small but poignant exhibition by New Zealand war photojournalist Wade Goddard. It's a chilling glimpse into how the Bosnian War decimated a city that for so long prided itself on its live-and-let-live outlook, but on a more positive note, is also a chance to reflect on Mostar's resilience and resurgence.

Beyond Stari Most, the rest of the beautiful Old Town awaits, a higgledy-piggledy warren of alleys and architectural gems including domes, minarets and arches. Prepare for your senses to be overwhelmed by colour, smells and the

timeless sound of haggling as you wander through Kujundziluk Bazar. The wonderful mayhem of polished metalwork, vibrant textiles and local produce (as well as the more sombre note of wartime relics) are evocative of bazaars you might expect to find farther east... but by now perhaps you'll have realised that Mostar isn't in the habit of conforming to expectations.

LOCATION Bosnia and Herzegovina

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 2005

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (vi)

TOP TIP Mostar's official currency is the convertible mark. However, most shops, stalls and restaurants will also accept euros, US dollars or Croatian kuna – but expect poor conversion rates.

***“THE MOST DRAMATIC
VIEWS ON THE ROUTE
ARE SAVED FOR LAST”***

There are 118 small arched stone bridges along the railway route



SEMMERING RAILWAY

TAKE ONE OF THE WORLD'S
FIRST MOUNTAIN RAILROADS
FOR A TRIP THROUGH AUSTRIA

Few train routes can claim to be as picturesque (or architecturally impressive) as the Semmering Railway, which starts at Gloggnitz station in Austria and ends up over 41 kilometres (25 miles) later at Mürzzuschlag station, 677 metres (2,221 feet) above sea level.

This railway is famous for passing through alpine terrain and areas of stunning natural beauty – think snow-capped mountains and alpine vistas – but it was awarded its place as a World Heritage Site in recognition of being a great work of engineering. The railway was built between 1848 and 1854 by 20,000 workers; a remarkable feat when you consider the fact that the tracks overcome an altitude difference of 460 metres (1,509 feet).

The Semmering line is still in use today, managed by the Austrian Federal Railways, and the entire route features 14 original tunnels (the longest is the 1,431-metre (4,695-foot) Semmering Tunnel), 16 viaducts and over 100 curved stone bridges. You obviously won't see

these spectacles when you ride on the train itself, but it's possible to plan several stops on your journey and take in the views of these features from neighbouring villages.

When the Semmering line was completed in the mid-19th century, it opened up a previously inaccessible landscape to tourists and new visitors. This means there are plenty of recreational stops for you to explore along the way. The entire route is roughly divided into four sections. Starting from Gloggnitz, it heads to Payerbach station, crosses the valley to reach Eichberg station, then travels through dense forest to Klamm-Schottwien station.

The most dramatic views on the route are saved for last, though. After travelling across a two-storey curving viaduct over the Kalte Rinne, the train passes through the Semmering Tunnel before reaching Semmering station. Semmering itself is a wonderful spot for trekking and hiking, especially in mid-summer when temperatures are favourable.

After Semmering, the train descends gradually along the right-hand slope of the Roschnitz valley, through Steinhaus and Spital am Semmering, before arriving at the final destination of Mürzzuschlag. From here, head to the Sudbahn Museum to find out more about the railway's original construction. If you're all trained out by this point, enjoy the town's local ski resorts and eating spots.

LOCATION Austria

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1998

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (iv)

TOP TIP Some first-class carriages offer panoramic train carriages for a better view.

© Alamy

GAUDÍ'S WORKS

BARCELONA HAS SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST ECCENTRIC BUILDINGS THANKS TO THE CITY'S ARCHITECTURAL GENIUS

LOCATION Barcelona, Spain

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1984

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (ii), (iv)

TOP TIP Barcelona has long had a reputation for pickpockets, so be careful when at tourist sites.

Barcelona's architecture is defined by the creative genius that was Antoni Gaudí, the innovative Catalan architect with an eccentric flair for surreal design. Born in 1852 and a part of the Catalan Modernism movement, Gaudí left his mark on the city in which he lived for most of his life, with a style typically hallmarked by patterned flamboyance and anarchic geometric forms.

Under his direction, buildings would be brought to life and this was perhaps seen most starkly at Casa Batlló, Gaudí's 1904 remodelling of an existing house on Passeig de Gràcia that shines with colourful exterior ceramics and mosaics.

It was also evident at the Basílica de la Sagrada Família for which Gaudí became chief architect a year into the ambitious project. He introduced curvilinear Art Nouveau and Gothic forms to a building he knew would never be finished in his lifetime. But what he left by the time he died in 1926 was a magnificent crypt along with the chapel of San José and the door of El Nacimiento. The cathedral, with its towering spires resembling melting candles, remains under construction today.

Both properties, along with five others, combine to form a UNESCO World Heritage Site known as the Works of Antoni Gaudí. There is also Casa Vicens, the first home he designed and one that was influenced by a type of Moorish Revival architecture called Neo-Mudéjar. And there is the private residence of Casa Milà, which is adorned with a curved stone facade, a lack of straight lines, two central courtyards, and decorative balconies made of wrought iron that was designed by fellow architect, Josep Maria Jujol.



Gaudí designed the neo-Gothic mansion Palau Güell, too, following a commission by the Spanish entrepreneur Eusebi Güell. It drew on the concept of space and light and it was created with a main hall that sends jaws dropping for its tall roof in the shape of a parabolic pyramid.

Güell also commissioned the Church of Colònia Güell in a Barcelona suburb called Santa Coloma de Cervelló (only the crypt

portion was completed), and he asked for the creation of a public park (Park Güell) on Carmel Hill, which took 14 years to create and is speckled throughout with Gaudí flourishes.

The main terrace is surrounded by a bench that resembles a sea serpent and bird nests are built into the walls. When joining the millions who visit Barcelona each year to see Gaudí's work, it's a great place to contemplate this gifted man's incredible contribution.

LAKE DISTRICT

BOASTING ENGLAND'S DEEPEST LAKE, HIGHEST MOUNTAIN, AND LONGEST LAKE, THIS NATIONAL PARK PROMISES NATURE ON A MONUMENTAL SCALE

For a Great British experience, look no further than the Lake District. This undulating patchwork of high mountains and mirror-topped lakes, and the largest of England's national parks, was added to UNESCO's World Heritage Site list in 2017 due to its extraordinary beauty and harmony. With stunning scenery and so much wilderness, it's

the ideal place to lose yourself in the sheer majesty of the natural world.

Head into the brisk fell air, trace the glassy edges of the lakes, or dive out of the sunlight and into the woodland trees. Armed with a map – or an app – the Lake District is a walker's paradise and there's a route for everyone. If you want to pick up the pace, there are no

LOCATION England

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 2017

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (v), (vi)

TOP TIP Climb England's highest mountain. Swim in England's deepest lake. Row across England's longest lake.



The rocks and mountains of the Lake District reveal millions of years of history

WRITTEN IN THE ROCKS

The distinctive lakes and mountains of the Lake District reveal secrets about the park's ancient past. The smooth, black rocks of the mountains in the northern part of the park contain sediments from the bottom of a 500-million-year-old sea. The tall crags of Scafell, Helvellyn and Langdale Pikes are the remains of volcanic eruptions that happened 450 million years ago. The limestone at Whitbarrow Scar contains the fossils of 320-million-year-old tropical sea creatures. This mix of rock types, along with 400-million-year-old granite and 420-million-year-old sandstone, has shaped the landscape that we see today.

The postcard-perfect scenery of England's Lake District promises breathtaking views and stunning photography



Rent a boat and head out onto the glassy water



shortage of cycling trails too. The weather can be unpredictable and the terrain uneven, so it's best to dress in layers and wear proper walking boots. On average, temperatures reach around 20 degrees Celsius (68 degrees Fahrenheit) in the summer and drop to 1 degree Celsius (34 degrees Fahrenheit) in the winter. Though far from extreme, the Lakes can be wet and windy, especially out in the fells. In fact, the Lake District hamlet of Seathwaite is the wettest inhabited place in England, but the view makes the risk of rain more than worthwhile.

If you're a keen-eyed wildlife enthusiast, your efforts may even be rewarded with a rare animal sighting. Grizedale Forest is home to red deer and red kites, while Derwentwater has otters and peregrine falcons – the fastest animals on the planet. Meanwhile, Whinlatter Forest and Dodd Wood hide some of England's last remaining red squirrels.

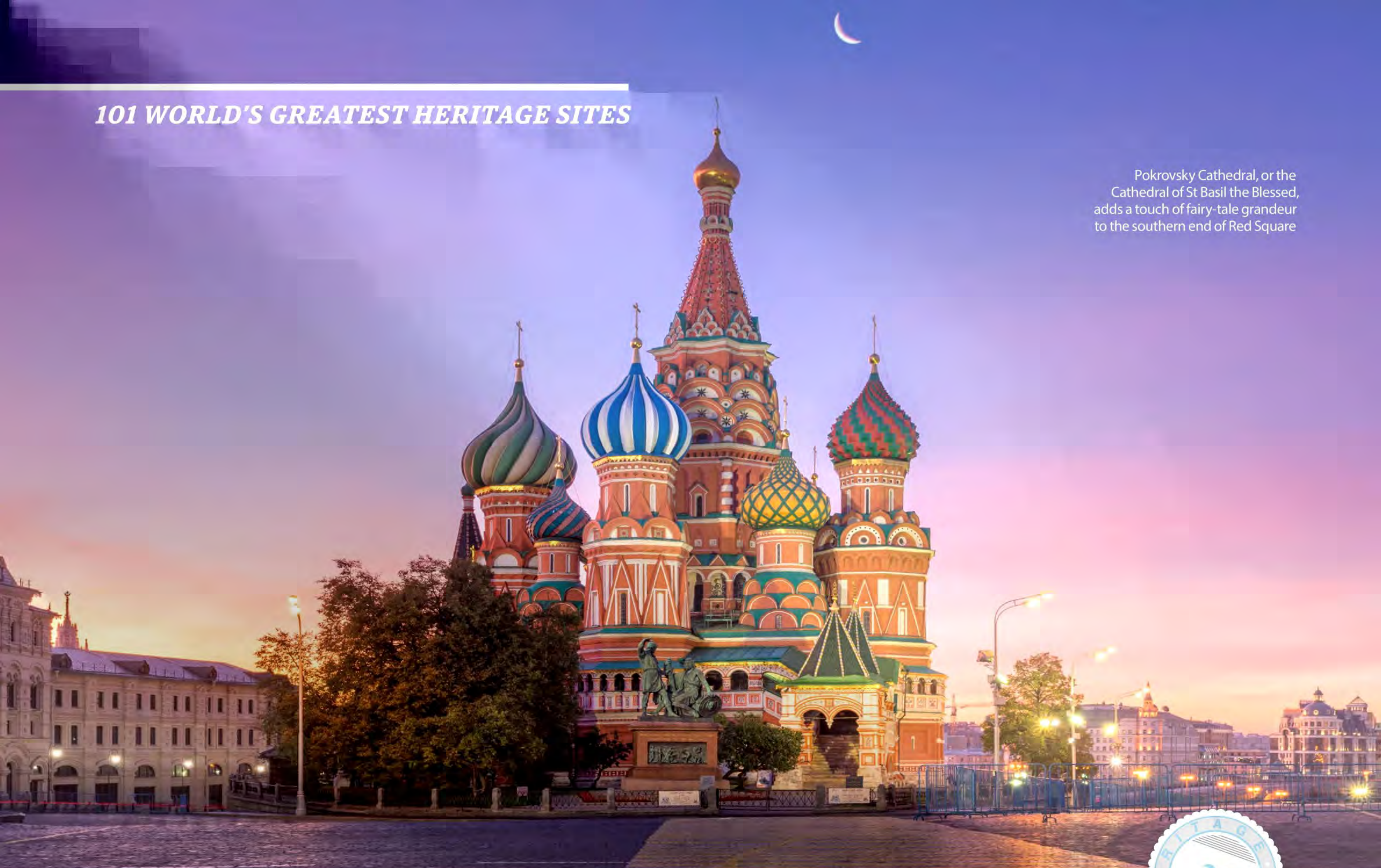
For travellers more inclined to learn about the long history of the Lake District, there are thousands of archaeological sites within the park boundaries too, including 283 scheduled

“WITH STUNNING SCENERY AND SO MUCH WILDERNESS, IT’S THE IDEAL PLACE TO LOSE YOURSELF”

ancient monuments that you can visit. Not to mention experiencing the stone-walled fields and rugged farm buildings in their spectacular natural backdrop.

Round out your trip by venturing onto one of the 16 lakes that give this glorious national park its name. Book a leisurely guided cruise, or rent your own boat from Coniston, Windermere, Derwentwater or Ullswater. Rowing boats, motor boats, paddle boats or canoes – the choice is yours. Get out on that glinting water and lose yourself in the view.

Pokrovsky Cathedral, or the Cathedral of St Basil the Blessed, adds a touch of fairy-tale grandeur to the southern end of Red Square



RED SQUARE

THE SPIRITUAL HEART OF MOTHER RUSSIA, MOSCOW'S RED SQUARE IS STEEPED IN HISTORY

Located just outside of the Kremlin's eastern wall, the cobblestone Red Square is flanked by a mosaic of architectural marvels, all standing to attention. Originally built as a fortification beside the Moskva River, it's lived many lives – as a slum, festival ground and market square, before finally becoming the backdrop to Russia's most poignant historical moments, from military parades to bloody executions. It was from here, in 1941, that tanks headed straight for the front line, and where rows of intercontinental ballistic missiles were paraded during the Cold War, to remind the West of the Soviet military might.

Without a doubt, the instantly recognisable Pokrovsky Cathedral, or St Basil's Cathedral, is Red Square's pièce de résistance. Standing at the square's southern end, its brightly patterned tented roofs and onion domes pierce the unending sky.

Commissioned by Ivan the Terrible, architects Postnik and Barma designed the uniquely Russian church, which was completed in 1561 and quickly became a beloved symbol

of the country. Legend has it that the architects were blinded on Ivan's orders so that they could never again build anything as beautiful. Within the cathedral lies a maze of nine stone chapels as well as a treasure trove of murals and icons from various periods. Close by, the macabre Lobnoye Mesto platform, known as the Place of Skulls, marks the spot where Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great presided over brutal public beheadings and hangings.

To the west, the imposing walls of the Kremlin flank the square's western border. Historically, the political nucleus of Moscow, today it's home to Russia's parliament, the Duma. Sitting in the shadow of the Kremlin lies Lenin's Mausoleum, where the father of the Soviet Union's embalmed body has been on display since 1924, despite the protests of his widow. Each day, long lines of mourners and tourists patiently wait for a glimpse of Lenin behind bulletproof glass, his head atop a velvet pillow, where he lies in perpetuity.

Just behind the Mausoleum, the Kremlin Wall Necropolis contains the mass graves of 238

Bolsheviks who perished during the October Revolution in 1917. The ashes of acclaimed Russians have been interred in the wall too, including the first man in space, Yuri Gagarin and writer Maxim Gorky.

Come nightfall, the Kremlin's towers and the fairytale domes of St Basil's Cathedral light up as the square empties, a beacon of Russia's storied past.

LOCATION | Moscow, Russia

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION | 1990

TYPE OF SITE | Cultural

CRITERIA | (i), (ii), (iv), (vi)

TOP TIP | Those keen to see Lenin's Mausoleum, should get there early to avoid the huge queues.

SINTRA

EXPLORE THE TOWN THAT
GAVE RISE TO EUROPE'S
ROMANTIC ARCHITECTURE

The picturesque town of Sintra is located in the west of the Iberian Peninsula, approximately 30 minutes from the capital city of Lisbon and a few kilometres away from the Atlantic Ocean. Fondly known as the 'romantic village of Portugal', its mesmerising views and medieval architecture attracted over 3 million visitors in 2017. Surrounded by tall, thick vegetation, the buildings of this ancient town, which include a collection of castles and palaces, have almost been woven into nature.

Sintra truly is a historic place. Occupation of the area can be dated back to the Paleolithic era, and the Convention of Sintra, which allowed French troops to evacuate Portugal during the Peninsular War, was signed here in 1808. 1995 saw the classification of the town as a UNESCO World Heritage Site under the category of 'Cultural Landscape'. Sintra has also been considered the summer home of the Portuguese monarchy. The Palacio Nacional Sintra is a dominant architectural feature in the town's centre and is the best-preserved medieval royal palace in the country. With its two enormous chimneys protruding from the kitchen, it has become somewhat of an icon.

Secreted in woodland, Pena Palace (a former monastery) is full of mystery and myths. This palace is a mix of decorative battlements, vividly painted terraces and mythological statues. Built in the 19th-century Romantic

style of architecture, the design ideals continue throughout the lush gardens, with mystical ornaments, hidden pathways and breathtaking views. However, Pena isn't the only location that boasts beautiful gardens. No visit to this town is complete without a walk through the Monserrate Palace and its incredible botanic gardens, home to plants from all over the world.

Watching over the town is the Moors Castle. Built in the 8th century by Moorish occupiers, it is sadly now a ruin. Yet its condition does not prevent it from offering exquisite views over Sintra and the rugged Portuguese coastline.

Downtown Sintra is a labyrinth of cobbled streets with bars, restaurants and local craft shops. Look out for artisans at work, particularly marble cutters and lace makers. Parking is restricted to residents, buses and emergency vehicles in the centre, but there are plenty of buses to all the tourist locations. Be sure to sample some of the local cuisine, especially the town's famous queijadas – sweet cakes made with fresh cheese instead of butter – and travesseiros, which are puff-pastry triangles filled with almond paste.

Accommodation is plentiful in Sintra, but booking in advance is advised as vacancies fill up quickly, particularly in the summer months. If you feel like a little bit of luxury, you can even stay in Seteais Palace, now a plush hotel.

LOCATION Iberian Peninsula,
Portugal

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1995

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (iv), (v)

TOP TIP Make sure you wear
sensible walking shoes as
the streets are cobbled.



The nearby Sintra Cascais Natural Park is home to a number of stunning beaches



Pena Palace was built by
Ferdinand II of Portugal on the
site of an old monastery



CARCASSONNE



The Cité de Carcassonne is a restored medieval fortress, and it has appeared in several TV series



The banks of the Canal du Midi, passing at the foot of Carcassonne, are lined with trees

LOCATION Languedoc-Roussillon Region, France

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1997

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (iv)

TOP TIP Carcassonne attracts around 4 million visitors a year, but visit in spring for fewer crowds.

DISCOVER THE HISTORY OF THIS ANCIENT WALLED CITY PERCHED ON A HILLTOP

The medieval town of Carcassonne in southern France is almost Disneyland-perfect in its setting. Found at the top of an elevated hill, it is world famous for its cobbled streets, city walls, bridges and watchtowers. But while Carcassonne is a site of great cultural importance and beauty, this means that millions of people visit each year, and it's best to go in early spring for a more relaxing tour without the sprawling crowds.

Carcassonne has a fascinating history to unravel. The first walls were erected in the Gallo-Roman period, and later additions were made throughout the 13th and 14th centuries. During the 17th century, the town fell into disrepair, as it was no longer used for trade, but the architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc began restoration in around 1853. It is thought that his project helped save Carcassonne and ensure that the city today is so well preserved.

The medieval core, the cité, is the part that was added to the UNESCO list in 1997, and a visit is a little like stepping back in time. Inside the medieval walls, you'll find the Château Comtal, which is the main castle of the upper town and features an impressive 31 towers. Guided tours of the château are usually worth

joining, as they also take in sections of the walls and the amphitheatre. If you want to discover a timeline of the city's history around its walls for yourself, though, head to the Chapelle des Dominicaines.

If you're looking for boutique shops and eateries, keep to one of Carcassonne's main avenues, Rue de Verdun. You can easily dart off and enter museums, restaurants and the tourist information centre, while also exploring the various medieval sites in the nearby area.

As well as there being plenty to entertain in the fortified city itself, Carcassonne also has a canal port, which offers whole or half-day canal trips and boat rentals. These trips are particularly fun for families and groups, especially when combined with a picnic of local fare. You can either travel down the tunnel of plane trees in a westerly direction, or to the east through Trèbes.

Tying in with its cultural status, Carcassonne has plenty of cultural events throughout the year, including a wine festival (October) and torchlight walk (December), where the descent of the medieval city is brightened by the colourful flaming torches. Like the site itself, it's an occasion of true atmosphere and character.

DELPHI

VISIT THE MOUNTAINSIDE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE THE GREEKS
THOUGHT WAS THE CENTRE OF THE WORLD

A group of tunic-wearing officials clambered up the steep stone steps of the Sacred Way, clinging onto the side of Mount Parnassos. As the sun beat down upon them, the scent of thyme lingered in the air. Out of breath, they eventually reached the sanctuary of the Oracle at Delphi – the place the ancient Greeks believed to be the centre of the world. All crucial decisions had to be run past the Oracle (otherwise known as the Pythia) in case she foresaw disaster. When her warnings were not heeded, great misfortune frequently fell upon the Greeks, so she held a uniquely powerful position in society.

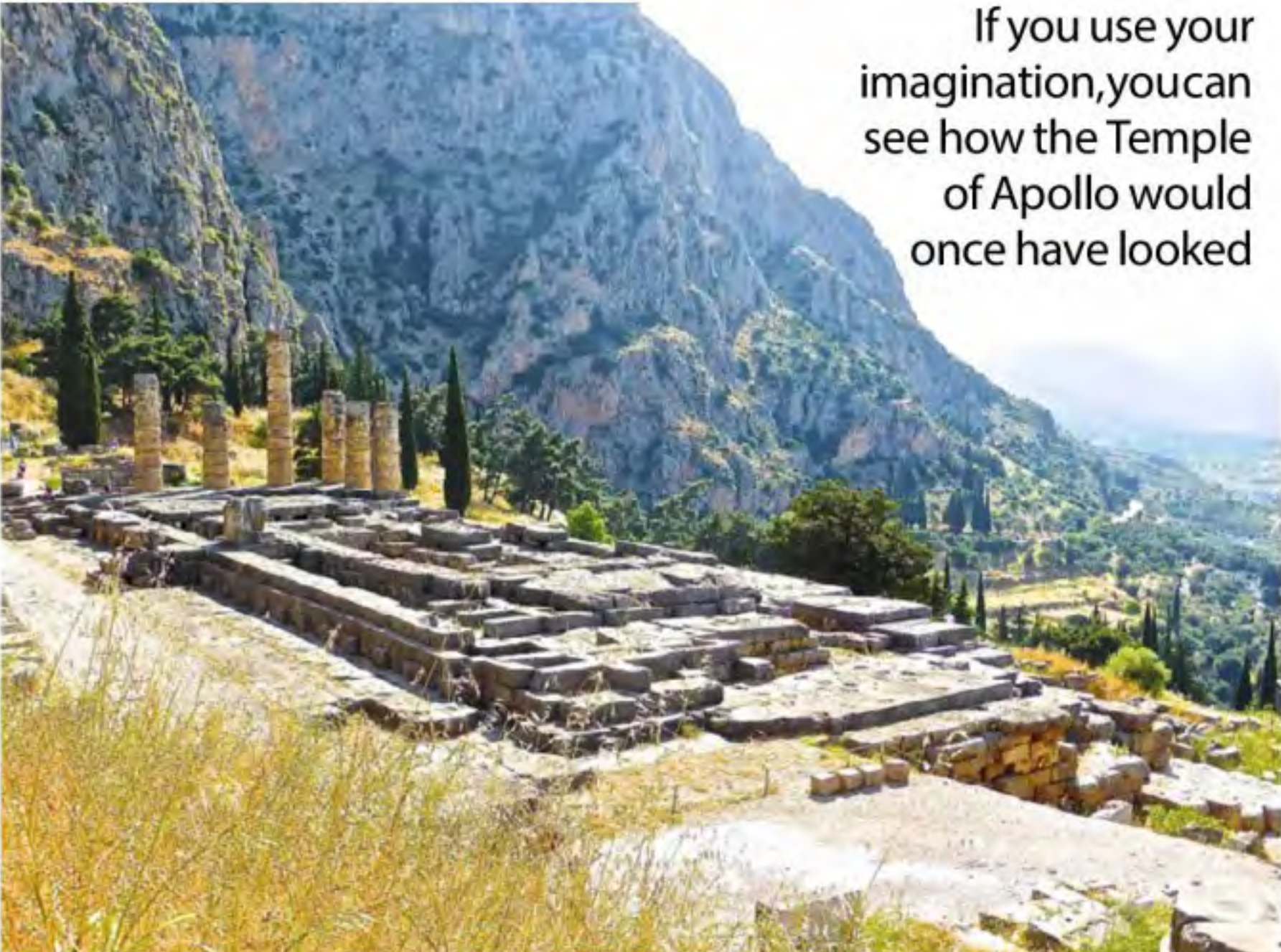
Delphi dates back to the 7th century BCE, when it was a centre of worship for Gaia, the goddess of the Earth. Then, in the 4th century BCE, a vast temple dedicated to the god Apollo sprung up on the site. This temple was one of the biggest in Greece, with vivid blue and red friezes running around its roof. It was also where the inner sanctum of the Pythia was located.

It's believed fumes leaked into the temple through a crack in the earth, and the Pythia was intoxicated by them. These fumes were said to have come from the decomposing body of a

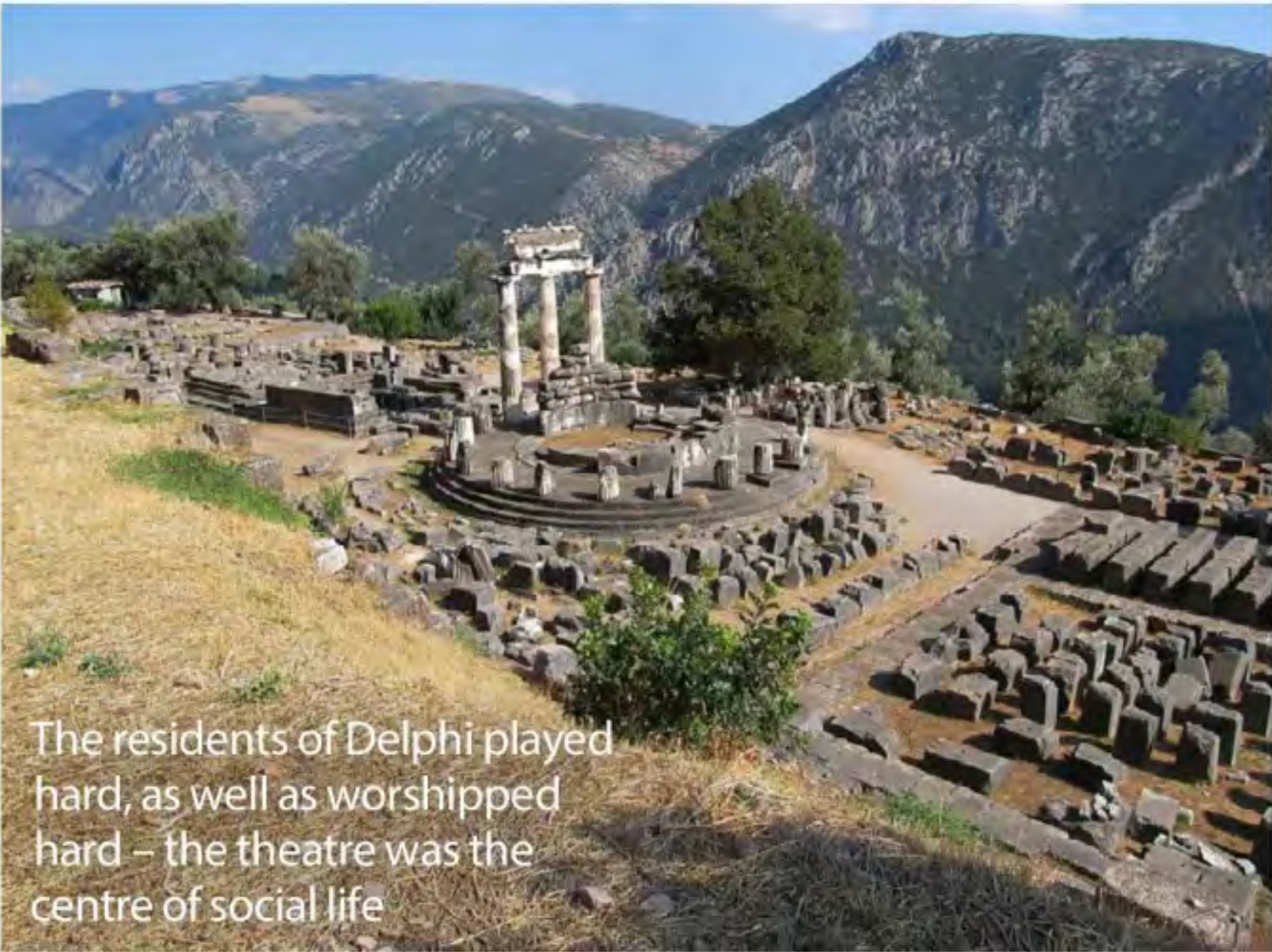
python Apollo had slain, so the trance the Pythia entered was a way for Apollo to communicate with mortals. Because she could not be understood, priests would 'translate' her words, and those who had come to seek the Pythia's advice would leave lavish gifts before they left.

The Temple of Apollo was Delphi's primary building, but there's so much more to see here. As well as smaller, better-preserved temples, you'll find treasuries, monuments, an ancient theatre and a stadium. Delphi was more than just a site of pilgrimage – it was a thriving town, and its residents needed entertainment just as much as anyone else. The theatre (directly above the Temple of Apollo) was where they sat and cheered for the Pythian Games, and the stadium at the top of the site was where exciting horse races and athletics contests took place.

A little further down the hill is another archaeological site, the sanctuary of Athena Pronaia. The gorgeous circular Tholos temple would once have had a decorated dome above it, and a few of its supporting columns remain. It's easily one of the most beautiful parts of the complex – visit at sunrise to experience its mystical atmosphere.



If you use your imagination, you can see how the Temple of Apollo would once have looked



The residents of Delphi played hard, as well as worshipped hard – the theatre was the centre of social life

LOCATION : Greece

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION : 1987

TYPE OF SITE : Cultural

CRITERIA : (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), (vi)

TOP TIP : Free car parking is available on the road, but get there early in the morning to make sure you get the closest spots.

The Tholos temple is the most recognisable part of Delphi



The central point of Old Kraków's Market Square is impossibly picturesque



KRAKÓW

A TOWN OF HISTORY, ARCHITECTURE AND CULTURE,
POLAND'S FORMER CAPITAL HAS IT ALL

Every major city has a spot that defines it; a recognisable landmark, street or situation that becomes iconic and instantly familiar. New York has Times Square, London has Tower Bridge, Tokyo has the Shibuya Crossing. But, while Kraków has just as many grand sights and tourist must-sees as any other city in the world, it won't take long until you find that one spot here. The historic centre of Kraków is tiny compared to the modern sprawl of the former capital, but there's a reason it was entered as one of the earliest UNESCO World Heritage Sites back in 1978. It really is the beating heart

of the city, encircled by Planty Park and dotted with quaint restaurants, ornate buildings and 24-hour opportunities to drink vodka should you need them.

The main hub of the Old Town is the market square – the largest in Europe – which dates back to the 13th century and acts as the city's epicentre, vibrating out on to the narrow cobbled streets. This is where Kraków's most familiar sight stands – St Mary's Basilica, the famed church whose asymmetrical spires are likely identifiable by most travel lovers. It's a fine example of Polish Gothic architecture and

it reaches 80 metres (262 feet) into the sky. It forms a key part of the World Heritage Site but there's a mix of other historic landmarks to glimpse in this market area.

These include the Baroque-style Kraków Cloth Hall, the former hub of international trade that takes centre stage in the Main Square. There's also the 1,000-year-old Church of St Adalbert (a great example of Polish Romanesque architecture) and the 13th-century Town Hall Tower – the only remaining part of Kraków Town Hall that once had a medieval torture chamber within its prison cellars.



A visit to Auschwitz is a sombre but essential part of any trip to Kraków

A SOMBRE VISIT

There's plenty more to see besides central Kraków and many people will base themselves in the city so that they can embark on a sombre yet crucial visit to the Auschwitz complex of concentration camps. It comprises Auschwitz I in Oswiecim as well as Auschwitz II-Birkenau, which had several gas chambers. There is also a labour camp at Auschwitz III-Monowitz, which provided a workforce for a chemical and pharmaceutical company called IG Farben although most will visit only the first two. Entry is free and it remains a dominant symbol of the Holocaust.

It will take you about an hour or so to reach the notorious site and there are plenty of public transport routes that will take you there, though a tour guide in the city itself can make the arrangements for you, and you can find relatively inexpensive taxis. Understandably, visiting the Auschwitz camps is not a pleasant experience, but seeing the camp grounds and learning about its horrific history are arguably just as important, if not vastly more so, than a stroll around the World Heritage Site of the Old Town of Kraków.

“THE MAIN HUB OF THE OLD TOWN IS THE MARKET SQUARE”

The surrounding townhouses add to the beauty of the open space, making just a stroll around the area and its cobbled streets all the more captivating. As you walk, you may be surprised at how well preserved Kraków is. Amid the Gothic spires are remains of medieval walls as well as many churches and monasteries. You can stop anywhere in the Old Town, take a drink and soak up this rich heritage. You'd never be disappointed.

But although it's what's on top that captivated UNESCO's assessors, you'll even find something to enjoy underneath the square, with the Rynek Underground museum providing a look at the life of Krakówians centuries ago. On top of a number of reconstructions of medieval structures, this novel museum uses fog and holograms to create a realistic depiction of how Kraków would have appeared 700 years ago. It includes a look at the excavated merchant stalls that were in place before the Cloth Hall was built.

Wandering south will bring you to the broad Vistula river, a popular destination in the summer months, where Kraków's sizeable student population makes the most of the green and well-maintained banks of the river or takes part in various water sport activities. Here, standing proud on the opposite side of the river, you'll spot Wawel Castle, a historic 14th-century fortress that has been added to over the years, spanning medieval, Renaissance and Baroque styles as a result.

The castle and the Wawel Hill complex is also part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site and it includes Wawel Cathedral and buildings that go back to 970 CE. A short walk down from the castle further south, however, will take you to Kazimierz, the old Jewish District that manages to blend 16th-century synagogues and public squares with trendy restaurants, indie

art galleries and cocktail bars. Again, part of the historic centre of Kraków, it's a seamless mix of modern cool and old. It was also once an independent city including the suburb of Stradom which was chartered in 1335. Shaped by both Jewish and Catholic faiths, it was from here that many Jewish inhabitants were forced into a ghetto.

If you want a historic excursion, then it's worth considering the Wieliczka Salt Mines. It's not part of the World Heritage Site, but the 13th-century complex was producing salt up until 2007, and it will now take you 300 metres (984 feet) underground through a cavernous maze of tunnels, an underground lake and numerous statues carved into the salt rock by the miners that worked the mines. There are even four separate, ornate chapels carved into the rock, replete with reception areas and chandeliers ready to host special events and weddings.

That's perhaps what's most surprising about Kraków: while it may have a number of recognisable landmarks – ones that are arguably worth the visit – it's able to provide culture, thrills and surprises in equal measure.

LOCATION | Poland

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION | 1978

TYPE OF SITE | Cultural

CRITERIA | (iv)

TOP TIP It's considered rude to wear a hat indoors, whether that is a church, a restaurant or someone's home – so take it off if you want a warm welcome.

©imageimage: Alamy; Pixabay; Wiki/pzk.net

Take in the sights of Kraków from the comfort of a horse-drawn carriage



The 15th-century Corpus Christi Basilica in Kazimierz is a fine example of Gothic architecture

BRUGES

HISTORY IS AROUND EVERY CORNER
IN THIS FAIRY-TALE TOWN



Take a walk at dusk to see
Bruges in a whole new light

***“BRUGES IS STRAIGHT FROM THE
PAGES OF A FAIRY TALE”***

With Flemish buildings lining the streets, narrow alleyways and little stone bridges over the Dijver, Bruges is more than picturesque – it is straight from the pages of a fairy tale. It's the perfect setting for classical paintings, something that the likes of Jan van Eyck realised. You could easily lose yourself wandering the original pattern of streets and spaces while drinking in the medieval atmosphere.

Perhaps best known is the Markt, one of the town's main squares. From here, streets lead off to other parts of town, but this is the location of its most famous building – the Belfry – which dates back to 1240. Made famous by films such as *In Bruges*, you can climb the 366 narrow steps of this 83-metre (272-feet) bell tower and, for a small fee, get a history lesson of what was once a treasury and the home of the municipal archives.

The tower affords a fantastic view over the rooftops, letting you soak in the Brick Gothic architecture that defines this former commercial metropolis. You can see prime examples at Old St John's Hospital and at the Basilica of the Holy Blood in Burg Square with City Hall to its left. Check out, too, the magnificent Church of Our Lady, which is not only notable for its flying buttresses but also its impressive height of 115.6 metres (379 feet), which makes it the world's second tallest brickwork tower.

It's also worth visiting the Archaeological Museum and the Gruuthusemuseum, which focuses on the history of Bruges. You can even visit the Frietmuseum, which gives you the lowdown on the history of Belgium's famous fries, from potato to plate to condiments. Much of Bruges is unspoiled and new developments have reflected a continuity. Little tranquil pockets, such as the white-fronted buildings of Beguinage, home today of the nuns of the Order of St Benedict, will also delight. They'll certainly stick in the mind long after you've spent many enjoyable hours poking around the back streets and walking along the canals.

LOCATION | Belgium

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION | 2000

TYPE OF SITE | (ii), (iv), (vi)

CRITERIA | Cultural

TOP TIP | Belgium is a bilingual country, but Bruges is in the Flemish-speaking part. It's a difficult language to learn, but don't worry – most of the people will speak English!



POMPEII

STEP BACK IN TIME IN ITALY TO THE
HEIGHT OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Vesuvius still looms over the ruins,
and you can climb it if you want to



If you've ever wanted to walk where the Romans have walked before you, Pompeii is the perfect place. Steeped in history with a dramatic past and a stunning up-close view of an active volcano, there's nothing you won't enjoy.

As ruins go, the Bay of Naples is sublime. When Mount Vesuvius, the volcano that looms ominously over the area, erupted in 79 CE, the pyroclastic surge left behind perfectly preserved buildings, streets and even loaves of bread. Thanks to that, we know the layout of almost the entire city, and today we can walk around it. Visit the baths where the citizens would have washed themselves, take a trip to a bakery, and read the graffiti painted on the walls that has remained there for almost 2,000 years. You can even explore a typical Roman house, with what remains of beds, tables and dining couches. And, of course, no trip is complete without a visit to the Villa of the Mysteries where you can view an original Roman fresco in all its splendid glory.

Even with a map, it can be easy to get lost in the streets and transport yourself back to the days of the early Roman Empire. It's the perfect day out for anyone interested in ancient history, and the site is close to local transport links. Perhaps the one drawback of Pompeii is that

while it gives you the layout of a Roman town, it does lack two-storey buildings. However, this is where a neighbouring city comes in.

Just a short journey away, Herculaneum, another town wiped out by the volcanic blast, sits, waiting to be explored. Although what's been excavated isn't as vast as the city of Pompeii, you can get a real sense of walking down a Roman street with homes where people lived and the reconstructed wooden balconies where neighbours would have conversed.

If after wandering the streets you want to see some artefacts, head on over to Naples, the sprawling modern city that lies at the foot of Mount Vesuvius. There you'll find the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, which houses objects and mosaics found at Pompeii and Herculaneum, as well as other Roman finds from the region. And there's no need to worry about the language barrier – the descriptions are all in English as well as Italian.

The real pièce de résistance, however, is the volcano itself. If you're up for a challenge, you can climb it. Vehicles can take you as far as 1,000 metres (3,280 feet) above sea level, but then you need to walk the last 200 metres (656 feet). However, it's not a race to the top – take your time and enjoy the view. On a clear day, the panoramic view takes you from

the city of Naples, across the blue water of the Bay of Naples to the gorgeous city of Sorrento and beyond it the island of Capri – both worth visiting. At the summit, you can peer into an active volcano – but don't worry, there are no hazardous fumes. It is worth noting, though, that Vesuvius will be dangerous when it erupts again. Its cycle is usually every 20 years, but it hasn't erupted since 1944. However, seismologists are closely monitoring it so it won't surprise anyone.

For Roman marvels, the Bay of Naples should be high on your list. With so much to do and see, you'll wonder why it took you so long.

LOCATION Italy

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1997

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (iii), (iv), (v)

TOP TIP There's very little information when you visit, so a guide book or audio guide is a good idea.

CINQUE TERRE

NESTLED IN THE ITALIAN RIVIERA, FIVE VIBRANT VILLAGES ARE BEGGING TO BE EXPLORED



You'll be spoilt for breathtaking views of the villages and the Mediterranean at Cinque Terre

Cinque Terre attracts 2.4 million visitors a year, and it's easy to see why. Located in a national park, these five colourful fishing villages – Monterosso, Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola and Riomaggiore – almost seem to be rising out of the Mediterranean Sea, and they carved out their place in the landscape in the late Middle Ages.

Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1997 and formed into a 38.6-square-kilometre (15-square-mile) national park, the five villages, the town of Portovenere, and the islands of Palmaria, Tino and Tinetto make the perfect area to explore. Ancient footpaths take you around the villages, and medieval fortresses are never far away.

In fact, if hiking is what you're visiting for, the national park is home to more than 120 kilometres (75 miles) of trails. While the Sentiero Azzurro, or Blue Path/Trail, links the villages, there are less-trodden routes that will take you through vineyards and groves while providing stunning vistas of the Italian sun bouncing off the Mediterranean in the summer.

Regardless of where you visit in Italy, eating local produce is a must, and this is no different in Cinque Terre. The seafood doesn't get much fresher, with mussels and more caught daily, and Italian cuisine never disappoints. In Vernazza, you'll find a hole-in-the-wall focacceria, as well as restaurants serving meals to suit every budget.

Just a stone's throw from Genoa, most tourists travel to Cinque Terre by train – there's a line from La Spezia to Levanto that stops at each of the villages – or by boat. The latter will give you stunning views as you sail in, but the Cinque Terre Card covers both the cost of the train and your hiking fees should you choose to follow a trail or two.

Some choose to holiday solely in the national park, while others make day trips from nearby Genoa and Pisa. Whichever you choose, there will be something for everyone; just make sure you venture out to the islands. Palmaria, once called the 'Island of Sirens' by Percy Shelley, is said to have inspired Botticelli's famed *Birth of Venus*, and you'll also find armoured

strongholds and anti-aircraft bunkers from World War II there. Whether you go for hiking, history or a wander around, you definitely won't be disappointed in Cinque Terre.

LOCATION Liguria, Italy

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1997

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (iv), (v)

TOP TIP Be prepared for hills and lots of them – you won't be able to find assisted transportation anywhere in Cinque Terre.



With numerous hiking trails showcasing breathtaking views, you can explore the area at a slower pace, and soak it all in



Fresh seafood is guaranteed pretty much every day

© Getty Images

JURASSIC COAST

DISCOVER GEOLOGICAL WONDERS, STUNNING BEACHES AND TOP VIEWS ALONG ENGLAND'S ONLY NATURAL WORLD HERITAGE SITE



Dorset's Durdle Door attracts thousands of visitors each summer, so be prepared for crowds

The Jurassic Coast, which spans 153 kilometres (95 miles) in total, is an awe-inspiring stretch of coastline in southern England. The site starts in Exmouth in the county of East Devon and ends in Studland Bay in Dorset, and features quaint towns, beaches, strenuous cliff-top walks (or easy strolls) and many geological features along the way. It's a paradise for walkers, cyclists and naturalists, as well as families. Must-see natural wonders include Durdle Door, Golden Cap and Old Harry Rocks, as well as Chesil Beach – a 29-kilometre-long (18-mile-long) shingle barrier beach stretching from West Bay to Portland.

Despite being a rugged landscape, the Jurassic Coast can be accessed without a car. A 'Jurassic Coaster' bus service runs regularly to popular stops, such as Charmouth and Lyme Regis, which is ideal if you want to hike a section of the South West Coast Path and then travel out or back by bus.

While the Jurassic Coast is a scenic landscape, it is more famous (and globally important as a World Heritage Site) for its

geology, home to rocks that offer an almost-complete record of the Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous periods in Earth's history. The sea has eroded the cliff rocks over millions of years to create the rugged landscape visible today, leaving behind fossils of extinct creatures along it.

Beach days can be had in West Bay, Lyme Regis and Seatown, to name just a few spots on the coast. However, always check the tide times, and whether dogs are allowed at the time of your visit.

Outdoor wonders aside, there are more than 15 museums across the Jurassic Coast area. One of the best – both for families and rock fanatics – is the Lyme Regis Museum, which has a stunning seafront location and fantastic views over Lyme Bay. The museum offers a newly updated learning centre, an interactive geology gallery, and regular fossil-hunting walks.

The town of Lyme Regis itself is arguably one of the most popular parts of the Jurassic Coast, with a traditional selection of seaside shops,

cafes and a beach that gives way to fossil hunting when the tide recedes.

The Jurassic Coast has so much to offer, whether you're interested in expansive views and fresh air, or geology and history. Invest in a detailed map, or look for free mini-guides created by the Jurassic Coast Trust.

LOCATION Dorset and East Devon, England, UK

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 2001

TYPE OF SITE Natural

CRITERIA (viii)

TOP TIP The safest places to try fossil hunting are the beaches between Charmouth and Lyme Regis.

PLITVICE LAKES

THE GATHERING OF WATER AT THE
PLITVICE LAKES OF CROATIA OFFERS
BREATHTAKING BEAUTY



The most popular tourist attraction in Croatia is the natural phenomenon of Plitvice Lakes, a wonder of waters where 16 lakes come together in stunning beauty. The Lakes, just 130 kilometres (81 miles) southwest of the Croatian capital city of Zagreb, are the main attractions in the Plitvice Lakes National Park, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979.

The national park covers 300 square kilometres (116 square miles), and includes shimmering turquoise waters with abundant flora and fauna. Cascading waterfalls connect the lakes in a resounding chorus, and invite visitors to linger and observe the sheer beauty of nature, where water has flowed for millions of years, creating a pristine marvel. Varied species of wildlife, including bears, birds, boars, wolves and deer, are also regular visitors to the life-sustaining waters. Hiking the trails throughout the park allows time to contemplate the natural setting or snap photographs of stunning vistas.

The Plitvice Lakes are worth the investment of a full day; however, many visitors choose to stay overnight and spend a bit more time exploring the lakes, waterfalls and hidden wonders. Be aware that crowds are common and trails may be congested at times. Still, for those with an adventurous spirit, the possibilities for discovery are endless.



You can rent small row boats in some areas of the park for around £6 (\$7.70) an hour



Walkways criss-cross the park, offering unobstructed views of the lakes

Two entrances allow access to the park, one for the lower lakes and another for the higher lakes, which converge over a distance of eight kilometres (five miles). Wear comfortable shoes and take water, lunch or snacks to save time – and be prepared for a dramatic shift in altitude. The highest point in the park reaches 1,280 metres (4,200 feet), while the lowest point is 380 metres (1,247 feet). The largest waterfall is the legendary Veliki Slap, which descends 70 metres (230 feet) to the crystal pool below. For those who wish to sit and immerse themselves in the moment, or take a leisurely stroll and enjoy the natural beauty, several rest areas are readily available.

A small train and several ferries operate daily within the confines of the park, transporting visitors throughout. A four-hour guided tour, available in English, German, Spanish, French, Italian and Croatian, may be booked ahead for a minimum of 15 people.

The park is open daily and offers extended hours during the summer months, typically between 7am and 8pm local time. Admission for adults is around £6.50 (\$9), although prices do vary with the busy season, increasing from April to October. Admission is cheaper for children, and those under the age of seven are admitted free of charge.



The entry fee includes transport within the park on the electric boat and panoramic train

HOW TO GET THERE

Getting to Plitvice Lakes National Park is straightforward. The nearest airports are located in Zagreb and Zadar, and car rental facilities are available. Day tours from Croatia's larger cities, with transportation there and back provided, are a popular option for many tourists. There are also regular buses to the area which you can catch for affordable rates. Overnight accommodation can be booked with one of the three affiliated hotels located just outside the park's perimeter, or you can rent a space at a campsite nearby. You could also choose to stay in private accommodation in one of the surrounding towns or villages, or for something different, try a farm stay.



LOCATION Croatia

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1979

TYPE OF SITE Natural

CRITERIA (vii), (viii),

TOP TIP Visit in autumn to witness stunning leaf colour displays

Plitvice contains 16 lakes and over 90 different waterfalls

©Getty Images

DOLOMITES



TRAVERSE THIS AWE-INSPIRING PALE MOUNTAIN RANGE
IN THE NORTHERN ITALIAN ALPS

The Dolomites is a truly impressive mountain range, which boasts a total of 18 peaks. With an area of approximately 1,419 square kilometres (548 square miles), the protected mountains span the provinces of South Tyrol, Trento, Belluno, Udine and Pordenone. Across this World Heritage Site, you'll be treated to sublime rock pinnacles, sheer cliffs, and rock walls, but also wildflowers and open meadows. The landscape of the Dolomites has been shaped by frequent landslides, floods and avalanches, and it's still alive today with shifting activity.

The Dolomites were originally listed as a World Heritage Site when they were recognised as a series of distinctive mountain landscapes unlike any other in the world, which are also of exceptional natural beauty. According to the official UNESCO website: 'their dramatic vertical and pale coloured peaks in a variety of distinctive sculptural forms is extraordinary in a global context'. Unique, in other words. Besides being absolutely stunning, the Dolomites are also home to important earth-science features,

including limestone formations, exposed geology and fossil records. Let's not forget that they also inspire thousands of artists, photographers and travellers every year.

As you'd guess just from looking at the landscape, the Dolomites are not somewhere to visit if you want to sit around. Hiking is the number one activity, and there are trails available for all abilities – from the largely flat Tre Cime di Lavaredo to the alternate route to Lago di Sorapis. For the most immersive experience – and to wake up to the sun rising across the mountains – aim to stay overnight in a rifugio (mountain hut). These refuges were originally shelters for passing mountaineers, but many have been developed to offer a comfortable stay with nature on the doorstep. If you plan your trip carefully, it's even possible to hike from hut to hut.

The Dolomites are also a playground for cyclists and skiers, and sport some of the world's best secured climbing routes – called 'klettersteige' in German, or 'vie ferrate' in Italian. These routes will offer you a safe way to

LOCATION Italy

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 2009

TYPE OF SITE Natural

CRITERIA (vii), (viii)

TOP TIP Major bus routes run from June to September, connecting the villages and popular hiking spots.

access some of the highest peaks, but aren't for those with a fear of heights.

When you visit the Dolomites, expect to find the road signs and local dishes listed in three languages. This is because the inhabitants of the South Tyrolean Dolomite valleys of Val Gardena and Alta Badia speak Ladin, not German or Italian, as their first language, a kind of Latin that has been around since the Roman Empire.



In the summer months, lush-green meadows sit below the impressive mountain peaks

The impressive ironwork Palm House dates back to 1882, though had to be partially rebuilt after being bombed in 1945



SCHÖNBRUNN PALACE

EXPERIENCE THE BEAUTY AND HISTORY OF THE RESIDENCE OF ONE OF EUROPE'S MOST POWERFUL FAMILIES

Vienna's majestic Schönbrunn Palace is a symbol of the once-great power and wealth of the Habsburg family, whose members sat on the throne of the Holy Roman Empire from 1438 to 1740, and ruled in countries including Hungary, Bohemia, Spain, Croatia and Portugal. The palace, in its present form, was primarily built during the 1740s and 50s, but later redecorated in the neoclassical style that it showcases today, at the behest of Franz I. The palace is an artefact of changing tastes and styles, its architecture, interiors and gardens showing layers of change and addition over its 300-year history. In 1918, the palace became the property of Austria, and has become one of its most popular attractions.

Just as stunning as the palace itself are the palatial gardens that surround it. The gardens have been intended to serve both as a way of paying tribute to nature and as a means of extending the grandiosity of the palace into the surrounding space. The gardens began being laid out during the 18th century via the formal French garden, composed of symmetrical flower beds, ornamental baskets, and carefully clipped and topiaried trees and hedges.

Like the palace itself, however, the gardens have grown and evolved over time. The

orangery, built around 1755, is the longest in the world at 186 metres (610 feet). The gardens also feature a beautiful 113-metre-long (371-foot-long) iron-framed palm house that features around 4,500 species of plant, making it one of the biggest botanical exhibits in the world. The house includes a 350-year-old olive tree and a *Wollemia*, a 'living fossil' species only discovered in 1994, among other fascinating and rare plants. An English-style garden – in other words a landscape garden that superseded the fashion for more formal French gardens in the 18th century – was constructed between 1828 and 1852.

As well as its impressive collection of fauna and its contrasting styles of stunning gardens, Schönbrunn also boasts its own zoo. First constructed in 1752, it is the oldest continually operating zoo in the world. Today, the zoo houses more than 700 species, including giant pandas, orangutans and elephants.

A fascinating location that displays a history of the different ways Western Europe has conceived of beauty, in architecture, interior design and nature, Schönbrunn Palace is both an important historic location and an aesthetic treat for anyone who has the pleasure to wander the palace and its stunning gardens.

LOCATION Vienna, Austria

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1996

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (iv)

TOP TIP Tickets are available that gain you access to multiple attractions, including tours of the grounds and entrance to the zoo.



Neptune Fountain in the foreground, and Gloriette rising on the top of the hill – two of the gardens' many beautiful features

© Wiki/ Martin Faibisoner; Simon Matzinger

WALLED CITY OF BAKU

PROTECTED BY A FIERY MAIDEN, BAKU'S OLD CITY FOUGHT ITS WAY INTO HISTORY

LOCATION Azerbaijan

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 2000

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (iv)

TOP TIP It's easy to get lost in the old city, but find your way back to Qichik Kala ring road and you'll be able to navigate again.

Azerbaijan is a place where desert meets the sea. Occupying a peninsula between Russia and Persia, two of history's mightiest empires, it was of great strategic importance – militarily, economically and culturally. The old city of Baku (now surrounded by skyscrapers and 19th-century city blocks) was the centre of it all. Baku was diverse, and home to the shipbuilder's district, the Jewish quarter, and even the formidable Dagestani blacksmiths' zone.

The settlement was built inside a fortified wall, which had existed since the 12th century when the Azeri Shirvanshah (king) moved his capital to Baku. To gain access to the hubbub within, you had to get past one of two of the gates – which, considering there were two layers of wall, would have been quite a task. Today, only one of these walls remains, but its beautiful golden stones are well worth admiring.

Rising above the walls is the iconic Maiden Tower, which – as a symbol of Azerbaijan – is featured on currency and postage stamps. Also constructed in the 12th century, Maiden Tower is as enigmatic as it is recognisable – historians continue to bicker over its purpose; it could be part of a Zoroastrian fire temple, or perhaps the clue is in the name – there's a legend that during a particularly nasty siege, a fire-haired virgin came from the tower and saved Baku from enslavement. The truth may be as elusive as the maiden herself, but it certainly makes for an interesting story.

In the medieval era, Baku was thriving. The new Shirvanshah, Ibrahim I, was keen to build a new royal residence there. He built a huge 52-room, two-storey palace, with ceremonial and official rooms, as well as living quarters for the Shah and his family. But that's not all



the palace grounds contain – mosques, tombs, and even a luxurious hammam (bathhouse) have been unearthed. To walk between the buildings, the Shah would have strolled through his gorgeous garden, a haven of greenery in a famously dusty city. You can do the same, and take a little respite from the chaotic old city streets filled with scooters, carpets, and all manner of shops.

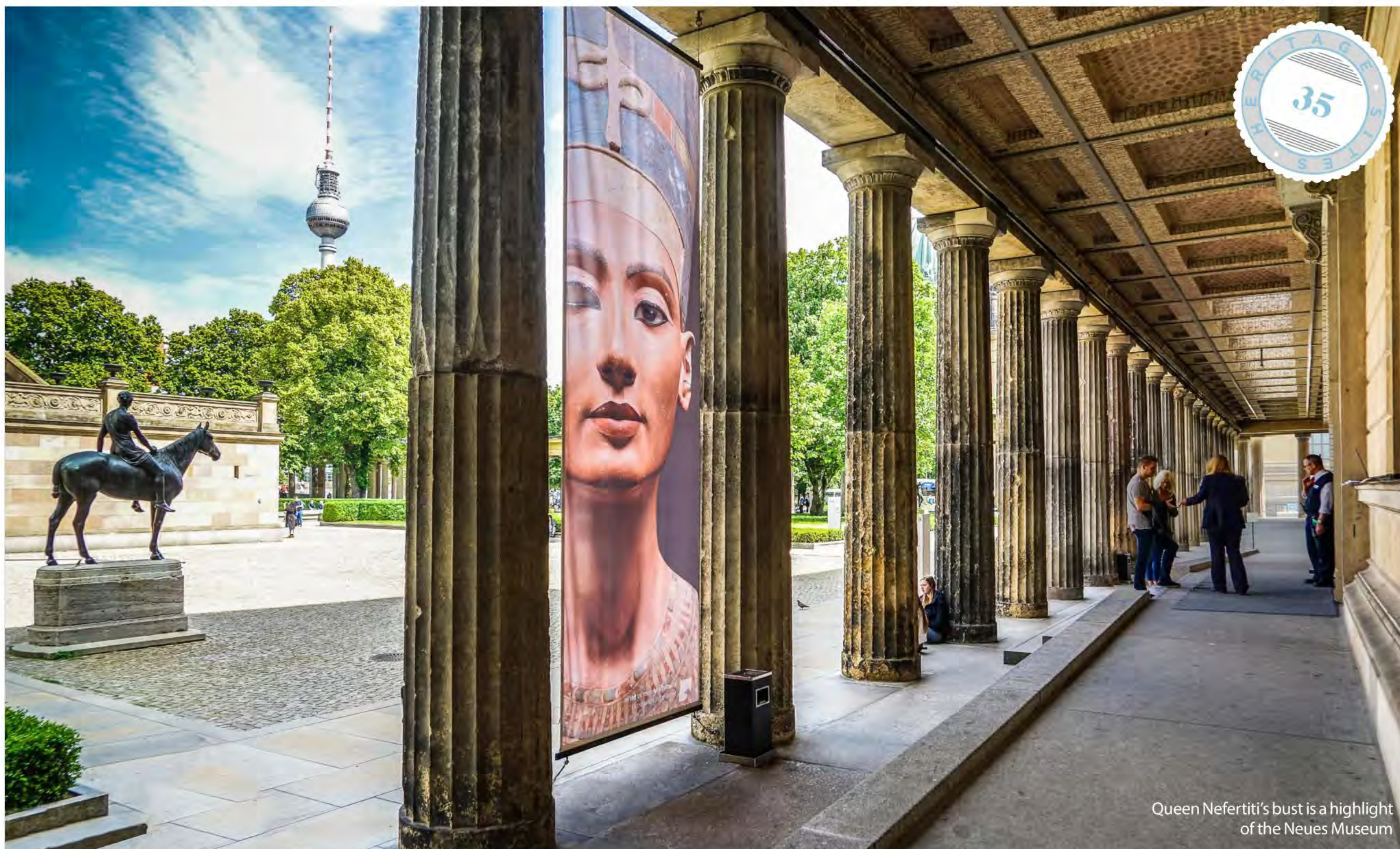
As Azerbaijan was a stop on the Silk Road, the World Heritage listing also protects

two caravanserais (similar to a modern-day roadside inn for camel trains). One is the Multani, whose patrons mostly originated in India. The other is the Bukhara – their customers, unsurprisingly, came from Central Asia.

The walled city's fusion of Zoroastrian, Arabic, Ottoman and European architecture exemplifies Baku's status as a cultural crossroads, and you will just have to come and experience it for yourself.

MUSEUM ISLAND

EXPERIENCE SIX THOUSAND YEARS OF HUMAN HISTORY THROUGH EXHIBITS, ARTEFACTS, ART AND MORE



Queen Nefertiti's bust is a highlight of the Neues Museum

Berlin's Museum Island is an impressive collective of five separate museums based in the city centre. Every museum has its own historic and artistic importance, and gives the general public access to fascinating artefacts, objects and works of art.

The museum complex was built between 1824 and 1930 by renowned architects of the time, and the first museum to open was the Altes Museum (Old Museum) in 1830. It was royally appointed to display only 'high art' – old master paintings and classic Greek sculptures – but don't let that put you off visiting. The building is stunning in itself, and archaeology of the Roman Empire is a standout offering.

The Alte Nationalgalerie (Old National Gallery) rises over Museum Island, and it was opened in 1876. Inside, the collection includes famous works by artists such as Claude Monet, Édouard Manet and Pierre-Auguste Renoir, alongside several modern works.

The Bode-Museum, which is found in a picturesque location on the north of Museum

Island, was completed in 1904. Inside, there's a vast collection of sculptures from the medieval period to the late 18th century, but the coin galleries are the most impressive collections, which include half a million coins and medals.

The Pergamonmuseum is the most popular museum in terms of visitor numbers, and was founded in 1910. Here, you'll find items spanning 1,000 years of history, from Iran, Asia Minor and Egypt.

Although work started on the Neues Museum (New Museum) in 1841, it was greatly damaged in World War II, and wasn't rebuilt and reopened until 2009. Since then, it's been home to renowned items from the Egyptian Museum, the most famous of all being the bust of the Egyptian queen Nefertiti.

You could truly spend days traversing Berlin's Museumsinsel. Located in the heart of the city, it earns its listing as a World Heritage Site not only because it's a unique concept, but because it's been impressively carried out for more than a century.

That being said, it wasn't until after the fall of the Berlin Wall that the Board of Trustees decided to renovate the whole island to what it is today. Ongoing planning of each museum – including the improvement of older exhibits – is constant, and in the Pergamonmuseum, restoration is even planned until 2033. With this in mind, it pays to check what's on show before you visit.

LOCATION Germany

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1999

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (iv)

TOP TIP A Berlin Museum Pass gives you free entry to all five museums.



THE TOWER OF LONDON

ACTUALLY A COLLECTION OF 21 TOWERS, THIS MEDIEVAL SITE IS STEEPED IN A DARK HISTORY

Originally built as a symbol of suppression by a foreign power, the White Tower, and the subsequent buildings that encompass the entire Tower of London complex, have been gradually absorbed into British culture and now stand as a symbol of the nation and the monarchy in particular.

Once William the Conqueror had seen off King Harold Godwinson at the Battle of Hastings, he needed to tighten his grip on the country and deter any rumblings of resistance. The first tower (known as the White Tower after it was whitewashed in the 13th century), was an imposing, forbidding structure. Situated on the Thames, it acted both as a visible reminder of Norman power, and as a fortress to guard the approach to London.

As an 11th-century military structure, it is unmatched. Having been maintained throughout its history, it remains a viable structure to this day, and still houses the Crown Jewels. In the past, it has served as a royal palace, a prison, a depository of historical documents, a menagerie and also the Royal Mint.

Unsurprisingly, given its original purpose of subduing the local population (colourfully described by one contemporary observer as 'vast and fierce'), the Tower was originally viewed with anger by the people of Britain. Deliberately designed to dominate the London skyline, it was not intended to be anything other than threatening. The entry level was on the middle of three floors, accessed by a

staircase that could quickly be dismantled in the event of an attack.

A fine example of a medieval keep, it was intended to function as both a royal residence and a fighting structure. It was actually besieged on several occasions, but it is best known for its role as a prison for both royalty and political dissidents.

The Tower was modified frequently, with new outbuildings steadily added over the centuries. As a fortress, it became obsolete with the adoption of gunpowder weaponry, but it had already become far more than a mere keep, and it remained an important site.

It continued to be used as a royal residence until the 17th century, housed the Royal Mint until the early 19th century, and even

functioned as a private zoo until 1835. Its military background also made it a natural choice for use as an armoury and barracks.

Most infamously though, the Tower of London was a site of imprisonment, torture and even execution (although very few people have actually been executed within its grounds). Ironically, for a building intended to function as a royal palace, the Tower has been prison to four queens of England, three of whom (Anne Boleyn, Catherine Howard and Lady Jane Grey) were executed. Only Elizabeth I got out with her head still attached.

More resonant even than these executions, however, is the mystery of the two princes. Edward and Richard, the 12 and nine-year-old sons of Edward IV, were confined in the Garden Tower, which earned its nickname as the 'Bloody Tower' following their disappearance. However, although it remains extremely likely that the two boys were murdered, no proof has ever been found, and rumours persist that they may have escaped.

The Tower also played a role in the turmoil following Britain's conversion to Protestantism. Henry VIII (not content with seeing two of his wives beheaded), also condemned several clergymen who disagreed with his actions, including Thomas More.

Death was sometimes a merciful release for those held at the Tower. Guy Fawkes was tortured mercilessly for two full days, refusing to reveal the names of his fellow conspirators in the Gunpowder Plot, and later being executed.

At the start of the 14th century, the Tower took on yet another function, that of housing the Crown Jewels. Triggered by a theft from the Abbey of St Peter at Westminster, the jewels were moved to what was then the most secure place in the country. Today, 23,578 gemstones are housed at the Tower, despite much of the original collection having been destroyed in the mid 17th century, when Britain was briefly a republic following the Civil War.

A visit to the Tower costs £25 (\$34), with children under 16 getting in for £12.50 (\$17). This enables viewing of the Crown Jewels, access to the White Tower and Bloody Tower, and tours by the famous Yeoman Warders.

Almost as famous as the Tower itself, the guards, known as 'Beefeaters' for their traditional diet, have been a fixture for around 500 years. Considered a position of privilege, the guards used to make a tidy sum from their jobs (which included the right to sell postcards), but such perks have long been abolished—although the Beefeaters remain friendly and highly knowledgeable guides.

“GUY FAWKES WAS TORTURED FOR TWO FULL DAYS AT THE TOWER BEFORE BEING EXECUTED”



The iconic Tower Bridge can be spotted from various windows in the Tower of London



If you visit the Tower of London, be sure to view the Crown Jewels, which have been housed here for centuries

LOCATION London, England

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1988

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (iv)

TOP TIP The Crown Jewels are a hugely popular attraction – give yourself an hour to view them.



Jubilee and Munin, two of the famed ravens of the Tower of London

THE LONDON RAVENS

Ravens have become almost synonymous with the Tower over its history – in fact, legend claims that the kingdom would fall if the ravens ever left, so their care is taken very seriously.

The Yeoman Warder Ravenmaster is responsible for ensuring the birds are safe and well looked after. Six ravens are necessary in order to prevent disaster from striking the nation, but a seventh is also kept, as a spare.

The tradition is believed to date back to Charles II, who liked the connection with the legends of Alfred the Great and decreed that ravens must always be present – not an easy decree to uphold as the birds can now fly. Their wings used to be severely clipped, but more flight feathers are now left intact, enabling them to fly to the top of the White Tower if they wish. One raven, Merlina, is even allowed to leave the complex occasionally, although thankfully she always returns.

MARRAKESH



GET LOST IN MOROCCO'S CULTURAL CAPITAL IN THE SAHARA SANDS

With its sand-coloured buildings, bustling streets and colourful markets, Marrakesh is Morocco's cultural jewel. Located in the shade of the stunning Atlas Mountains, at the very edge of the Sahara Desert, it has been home to a vast variety of people over the ages – from native Berbers to Arabs, as well as French colonisers and folk coming from all over Africa. The result is a real melting pot of influences – and it really shows.

Officially founded in the 11th century by the Almoravid Berber chieftain Abu Bakr ibn Umar, Marrakesh became a cultural centre, as its rulers erected a number of stunning mosques and madrasas. Over the years, its reputation has spread across Africa, and people came from all over the continent to trade goods with each other.

Sticking up in the Marrakesh skyline is the minaret of the Koutoubia Mosque, located at the very centre of the city and noted by UNESCO – Marrakesh seems to sprawl out around it. If

you think you've seen it before, you probably have – the minaret served as an inspiration for La Giralda's cathedral spire in Seville. Opened in the 12th century, it was built next to the king's residence, and designed so that nosy worshippers couldn't get a look into his private quarters from the minaret. Inside, there are six rooms, each with its own architectural style. The grounds of the mosque feature destroyed ancient foundations (with information boards to tell their story), as well as expansive gardens with tall palm trees fanning the pathways.

Seeking to build upon Marrakesh's lofty reputation as an intellectual hub, Saadian dynasty sultan Abdallah al-Ghalib embarked on a massive construction project in 1565: the Ben Youssef Madrasa, again mentioned by UNESCO as an important part of the heritage site. At the time, it was the largest Islamic study centre in all Morocco, said to accommodate up to 800 students. As well as Quranic teachings, students learned about literature, history and science.

The Ben Youssef Madrasa is one of Marrakesh's oldest – and most beautiful – landmarks



The Koutoubia Mosque really stands out on the skyline, as local law prohibits any new buildings from standing taller than it



LOCATION | Morocco

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION | 1985

TYPE OF SITE | Cultural

CRITERIA | (i), (ii), (iv), (v)

TOP TIP | Try to grab a good deal by giving haggling a go at the famous souk.



©Getty/ PhiloPhotos

If you're short of time, the Menara Gardens are right next to the airport, so make a good first or last excursion in the city

“MARRAKESH IS A REAL MELTING POT OF INFLUENCES – AND IT REALLY SHOWS”

The buildings are centred around a stunningly symmetrical courtyard, featuring a classically Moroccan reflecting pool, and the walls are adorned with beautiful Islamic geometric patterns. Besides the educational buildings, you can also look around the student living quarters, perhaps to see how they compare with modern-day dorms. Much better, probably.

Built by Abdallah al-Ghalib's successor, Ahmad al-Mansur, the El Badi Palace ruins are another must-see in Marrakesh. In its heyday, the palace was easily the grandest in the city, built using costly materials such as onyx and gold. Archaeologists estimate that the palace once had 360 rooms, playing host to political intrigues, private scandals and foreign dignitaries from far and wide. After the fall of the Saadian dynasty, their Alaouite successors stripped the palace of anything valuable, and left it to rot. Today, its ruins are carefully preserved.

Follow Ahmad al-Mansur to the grave by visiting the Saadian tombs, another major UNESCO-highlighted landmark on the Marrakesh trail. The tombs are the final resting place of al-Mansur and his family, as well as some servants and soldiers. Constructed from dazzling Italian marble, it's surprising to learn that these beautiful royal tombs were hidden from the world for centuries. The Saadians' vanquishers, the Alaouites, were keen to downplay their predecessors' influence, so the tombs were walled up. The only way to get to them was through a small passageway in the Kasbah Mosque, accessible only to a few. However, thanks to newly invented aerial photography, the tombs were discovered from above in 1917. Since then, they've been lovingly restored to their former glory, and you're able to wander around them at your leisure.

Marrakesh's rulers, no matter which dynasty they hailed from, seem to have been avid gardeners. They built many lovely green spaces

throughout the city. Arguably the most famous of these is the Menara botanical gardens, a little way out of the city centre – right next to the airport, in fact. Among the fruit orchards and olive trees, a golden Saadian-era pavilion overlooks a rectangular reflecting pool. It's best to visit the Menara gardens in the evening, if you can – that way, you'll see the gardens bathed in a warm sunset glow. On a clear day, you'll be able to see the snow-capped Atlas Mountains in the background – the perfect spot for taking some great photos.

Jump forward in time a few centuries to capture a shot of your own at one of Marrakesh's most-Instagrammed landmarks, the Bahia Palace. Walk through its halls to experience all the different eras in Marrakesh's past – although the palace was built in the 19th century, its builder, Si Moussa, wanted to showcase the best of his country's history. Inside, you'll find an homage to traditional Moroccan styles, including sandstone walls, geometric marble rooms and colourful Islamic art. The gardens are even better – there are a number of courtyards filled with palm trees, water features and brightly coloured stained-glass windows to admire. The pièce de résistance, however, is the final courtyard, a vast expanse of intricate tiling; blue, yellow and red ceiling decorations; and picturesque fountains scattered with delicate petals. You could easily spend an entire afternoon here, soaking up the sun and revelling in the greatness of Moroccan design.

For a taste of modernist Marrakesh, step inside the walled Majorelle Gardens – otherwise known as the Yves Saint-Laurent gardens, after the famous French designer led efforts to restore the gardens in the 1980s. Originally laid out in the 1930s, the gardens, known for their trademark cobalt buildings and terracotta pathways, are unique because they blend traditional Moroccan landscaping with unmistakably European architecture. The

bright-blue Cubist villa (which now houses the Berber museum) at the top of the gardens looks like it would be more at home on the French Riviera than in Marrakesh. Still, you'll never forget the incredible colour scheme and botany on show here.

Last but certainly not least on the Marrakesh itinerary is a trip to the famous souk – and we suggest you do save it until last, otherwise you might spend all your money here! Entering from Jemaa el-Fnaa square, apparently Africa's busiest square, explore the endless narrow passageways packed full of exciting goods and wares. As well as standard souvenirs, you'll find all manner of spices, food, traditional cooking items (yes, including tagines), furniture, clothing and even books here. Try to grab a good deal by giving haggling a go – but be warned, Marrakesh's market sellers drive a hard bargain!



Experience the sights and sounds of Marrakesh at Jamaa El Fnaa Square

JAMAÂ EL FNAA SQUARE

Described by UNESCO as a “true open-air theatre”, Jamaa El Fnaa Square is certainly dramatic and it has lost none of its charm over the decades. Declared a “Masterpiece of World Heritage” in 2001, it's a place of street theatre, of music and of stories where people assemble to be social, buy water and eat. It's a living, breathing space that reflects all sections of society, good and bad, but it's certainly a must-see addition to any itinerary during a trip to Marrakesh.

Go at various times because it changes throughout each day, serving the local population with medicines and health treatments from the morning, while becoming more of a carnival as the afternoon and evening wears on. It's an assault on the senses and the stories will be difficult to understand if you're not Moroccan. But that doesn't put off an ever-growing number of tourists who love the fresh orange and grapefruit juices and there is definitely much to enjoy and experience.

©Getty images

SERENGETI NATIONAL PARK

FOR SOME OF THE BEST WILDLIFE VIEWING ON THE PLANET, LOOK NO FURTHER THAN TANZANIA

LOCATION Tanzania

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1981

TYPE OF SITE Natural

CRITERIA (vii), (x)

TOP TIP It's best to go with a safari tour operator since they best understand the land.

Thundering across the plains of Serengeti in Tanzania in the east of Africa, some 1.5 million wildebeest make a 1,931-kilometre (1,200-mile) journey towards the green pastures of the Maasai Mara Game Reserve in neighbouring Kenya. It is the largest movement of animals in the world, and the wildebeest are not alone; they are joined by thousands upon thousands of zebra and Thomson's gazelle. As such, it's a truly amazing, jaw-dropping wildlife show and definitely one of life's natural wonders.

Serengeti National Park is an impressive wildlife sanctuary, established in 1951 and designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site 30 years later. An area of outstanding beauty, it has attracted controversy over the years – not least for the British-led decision to move most the Maasai people from the land – but the motivation was to preserve the wildlife and it thrives in abundance. Here you can see the densest lion population on Earth, and view African leopards, African bush elephants, eastern black rhinoceros and African buffalo.

Indeed, the wealth of wildlife is overwhelming, with 4,000 spotted hyena, golden wolves, mongooses, otters, cheetahs, Masai giraffes, warthogs, hippos, species of antelope, more than 500 species of bird, reptiles from the Nile crocodile to the leopard tortoise to chameleons, black mambas and puff adders. That's only brushing the surface, too. A trip to Serengeti National Park is like a who's who of iconic animals, which conservationists work hard to protect and help thrive.

Going to the national park is therefore of benefit financially for those seeking to prevent poaching, making it a most noble trip. It's split into three sections with the endless plains of

The Serengeti is home to the densest lion population on Earth



the 'serengeti' in the south and centre the most popular and where you'll view the majority of the amazing wildlife. You'd see less in the north, at the point where it merges with the Maasai Mara Reserve, but a trip to the western corridor is worth it for the forest and the animals around the Grumeti River. Everything you've dreamed an Africa safari to be is found here, and there's an abundance of trips you can take, from the traditional game drives during the day to the night tours, walking trips and ventures that can take you up high for views from a plane.

At 14,750 square kilometres (5,695 square miles), don't expect to cover the entire park. Pick your interest and you'll be able to hit the long, rough roads for the ride of your life. There are wonderful stops, including the Serengeti Visitor's Centre where you can refresh and catch a glimpse of passing wildlife, and some Maasai villages.

One highlight is the Moru Kopjes, home to the black rhino and the Serengeti Rhino Project. The scenic rock formations in this area are a phenomenal sight, tinted red due to the oxidation of the iron they contain and a point at which animals and plants thrive, safe from the harsh weather of the plains.

But while there is an opportunity to seek out the Olduvai Gorge, where the first early human species is understood to have resided

and where the complexities of humanity can be seen, mainly in the stone tools that have been uncovered there, it's the wildebeest that will prove the largest draw. You'll never return disappointed.

Giraffes and zebras walk the land at Serengeti National Park, Tanzania



©Getty Images

ROBBEN ISLAND

FROM SYMBOL OF OPPRESSION TO BEACON OF HOPE, ROBBEN ISLAND HAS CERTAINLY UNDERGONE A STUNNING TRANSFORMATION

Some places seem destined to be a scene of misery, oppression and hopelessness, but Robben Island has transcended its past to stand as a symbol of resistance and hope. Brief, unfulfilled plans to turn the place into a holiday destination in the 1930s stand out amid a history of far darker uses. It has served as a prison, a leper colony and a military base, and is most famous as the place where Nelson Mandela spent nearly 20 years of his life as a political prisoner of South Africa's Apartheid regime.

An undistinguished outcrop, measuring 4.75 square kilometres (1.84 square miles), Robben Island sits about 12 kilometres (7.5 miles) north of Cape Town. Settlements were limited to the south and east sides of the island, as severe weather made the other areas uninhabitable. The Dutch East India Company first set up a prison, with the British following suit after they captured the island.

Things improved slightly in 1846, when the prison was closed and a hospital was set

up – but it was a hospital for the insane, the chronically ill and lepers, with the quality of care being indifferent at best. The hospital soon became the exclusive preserve of lepers, until it was closed in 1931. After serving as a military base through World War II, the history of the island entered its darkest phase in 1959, when a maximum security prison was built. The first political prisoners were incarcerated in 1962, with Mandela arriving in 1964. He would remain until 1982, when he was moved to Pollsmoor Prison in Cape Town.

The island's history makes it a unique site. While various other islands have also served as penal colonies (including the infamous Alcatraz in the United States), political imprisonment has not been a feature of these places. The remarkable history of the island, and its subsequent transformation into a symbol of resistance, was summed up by Mandela himself during a visit to his old prison in 1997. "Robben Island is a vital part of South Africa's collective heritage," he said in his capacity

as president of South Africa. "How do we reflect the fact that the people of South Africa as a whole, together with the international community, turned one of the world's most notorious symbols of the resistance of oppression into a worldwide icon of the universality of human rights, of hope, peace, and reconciliation?"

LOCATION Western Cape Province, South Africa

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1999

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (iii), (vi)

TOP TIP It costs around £50 (\$65) for a five-hour tour around the island.

©Getty Images

Robben Island is around 12km (7.5mi) off the coast of Cape Town



GOLESTAN PALACE

EXPERIENCE THE GLITZ AND GLAMOUR OF QAJAR PERSIA AT TEHRAN'S MOST BEAUTIFUL ROYAL RESIDENCE

LOCATION Tehran, Iran

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 2013

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (iii), (iv)

TOP TIP There are separate tickets for the various halls, palaces and museums of Golestan, so buy them all at the main gate.

It's a little known fact that Iran is the sparkliest country in the Middle East, decked out with mirrored mosques, bejewelled palaces, and fountains that glimmer under the hot sun. This is thanks to the Qajar dynasty, who ruled Iran (then Persia) from 1779 to 1925. They had a penchant for glitter and, soon after taking control of the country, they set about renovating Tehran's Golestan Palace in their own unique style.

The first Qajar Shah (king), Agha Mohammad Khan, chose Tehran as his new capital, and the citadel was to become his home. When he died in 1797 his successor set about redecorating the citadel. Fat'h-Ali Shah's first major achievement was the construction of the Throne Room, the centrepiece of which is a richly carved marble throne. Built in 1806 from the famous yellow Yazd marble, a raised platform (where the Sultan sat) is supported by figures depicting Persian people in traditional attire. Future coronations of Qajar Shahs took place on this distinctive throne, cementing its place in Persian history.

In its present form, the Golestan Palace is a complex of 17 buildings. Some are palaces, some are halls, while others have become museums. The Qajar monarch that left the biggest mark on it was Naser al-Din Shah, who ruled in the mid-19th century. He was the first Persian ruler to ever visit Europe, and he fell in love with the buildings and artworks he saw on the continent.

Perhaps the most famous room in the Golestan Palace is the Mirror Hall, which with its large windows and reflective wall panels looks as if it was taken from the Palace of Versailles. Staying consistent with the European theme, it houses gifts given to the Persian



The Golestan Palace is a haven of greenery in busy Tehran



The Brilliant Hall certainly lives up to its name

monarchs by their European counterparts, including fine porcelain from France and spectacular green malachite table decorations from Russia. Even more dazzling is the Brilliant Hall, which is not only covered in mirrors, there's a chandelier that drips light through its glorious crystals.

The mirrored halls, stained glass windows and European furnishings of the palaces are awe-inspiring in themselves, but it's the grounds of Golestan that really come into their

own. The vibrant Edifice of the Sun, one of the entrances to the palace, is an incredible fusion of Persian, Islamic and European architecture, utilising ancient tile patterns, geometric designs and gorgeous glass windows. Step through this glorious gatehouse and stroll through the gardens – 'Golestan' does mean 'Garden of Roses', after all. Look out for its hidden corners, as you may stumble across a pretty water feature, or beautifully decorated pavilion to shelter from the sunshine.



The free-standing mountain of Kilimanjaro is a dormant stratovolcano that last erupted 360,000 years ago



KILIMANJARO NATIONAL PARK

A BREATHTAKING TRIP – EVEN IF YOU DON'T END UP MAKING THE CLIMB

Kilimanjaro is Africa's highest point as well as the highest free-standing mountain on Earth. As such, whether you decide to embark on the arduous scramble to one of the world's Seven Summits or simply admire its splendour from within the surrounding national park, this dormant volcano and its three peaks of Kibo, Mawenzi and Shira cannot fail to take your breath away.

From its base, snow-capped Kilimanjaro stands at 4,900 metres (16,076 feet) and it stretches 5,895 metres (19,341 feet) above sea level. UNESCO considers it an "outstanding example of a superlative natural phenomenon" and the organisation also draws attention to the lower slopes of cultivated farmland, the heathlands and moorlands, in addition to the wrapping belt of montane forest, and the cold, windswept alpine desert.

Those visiting as a climber certainly won't be alone. Since the mountain can be hiked without the need for any technical skills or special equipment, some 50,000 people go up and down each year. They navigate the steep ridges

and shelter in the numerous caves, assisted by hard-working porters on an adventure first taken by German geologist Hans Meyer in 1889.

The sense of achievement at reaching the top has not diminished in all that time and it is sure to provide an uplifting experience. Check out the scenic views throughout your trip and settle down to bless your eyes with spectacular sunsets and sunrises, shared with people who are almost certain to become firm friends by the time you leave.

Don't be too hasty in beating a retreat home, though. A visit to the Kilimanjaro National Park would not be complete without at least some attempt to spot the many animals that live across the mountain, including within the forest.

There are elephants, giraffes, buffalo, leopards, lions and rhino, as well as animals that may be even harder to see including genets, servals, crested porcupine, civets and furry tree hyraxes. In total, there are currently 154 recorded species of mammal in the area and, while you're very unlikely to come across a vast percentage of them, they're out there,

busy making great use of the diverse habitats on offer.

It's also worth visiting the towns, including Marangu with its waterfalls, underground tunnels and opportunity to learn about the history and culture of the Chagga people. You can discover more about the nomadic Maasai tribe, too, some of whom live at the border between Moshi and Arusha, albeit a drive away from this most magnificent of national parks.

LOCATION Tanzania

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1987

TYPE OF SITE Natural

CRITERIA (vii)

TOP TIP If you are intending to make any climbs, you must be physically fit and well-prepared.

PETRA

FROM TEMPLES CARVED OUT OF THE CLIFF FACE TO IMMENSE STRUCTURES, JORDAN'S PETRA IS A STEP BACK IN TIME

Of all of the ancient cities in the world, few surprise and enthrall in quite the same way as Petra, situated on the slopes of the mountain Jebel al-Madhbah between the Red Sea and the Dead Sea in the Arab state of Jordan. It's a magical city of rose-coloured rock, with splendid gasp-inducing sights at every turn. But unlike many other monuments on a sightseeing wishlist, Petra amazes not only on the surface, but with the manner of its formation. There really is nowhere else like it on Earth.

Petra was first inhabited some 11,000 years ago, but its development proper began when a tribe of Arabian nomads called the Nabataeans settled there from the 5th century BCE. As they became rich off the trade routes that crossed their land – dealing in frankincense and myrrh from Yemen, Chinese silks, Indian spices and cotton – they created a majestic cosmopolitan city that was hallmarked by its beautiful buildings and gardens.

But while many have built impressive monuments over the centuries, none have done so quite like the Nabataeans. Take a journey down through the wide valley known as Bab as-Siq, and keep going through the winding, narrow, dim gorge that is the Siq – the

main entrance to the city that runs for just under 1.5 kilometres (one mile) – and you will end up at Al-Khazeneh, also known as the Treasury. What you'll see will astound you, for the structure was elaborately carved into the sandstone in the 1st century BCE. It was quite obviously designed to impress, and that it does in spades. Its facade measures 39 by 30 metres (128 by 98 feet), decorated with incredible carvings that highlight Nabataean culture. There's a giant urn, and a central figure said to be a combination of the Egyptian and Greek goddesses Isis and Tyche respectively, flanked by Amazons. With two large eagles, two lions and six columns that end in floral capitals beneath the main pediment, it'll induce a sweat perhaps only matched by those who carved it.

Yet what is perhaps most surprising is that the Treasury is primarily for show: enter and you'll encounter a relatively small hall, since its purpose was actually as a royal tomb for the Nabataean king Aretas IV. Only when Swiss explorer Johann Ludwig Burckhardt rediscovered the ruins of Petra more than a millennium after it had been deserted following a devastating earthquake in 749 did it become known as the Treasury. That was in 1812 and the structure was believed to hold riches.

But just as the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* was entirely incorrect to suggest the site was the resting place of the Holy Grail (its facade was made famous in the film), so too was the 19th-century hunch so very wrong. Indeed, the urn was peppered with gunshots when the nomadic Bedouins opened fire in the hope that treasure would eventually spill out. In fact, it is made from solid sandstone and yet the legend is every bit as exciting as any visit to Petra will undoubtedly be.

More carved tombs are found along the southern cliff face on what is known as the Street of Facades, proving that there is far more to Petra than its most famous sight. There are more than 40 of these tombs spread over a number of tiers in a wide area just past the Treasury in the Outer Siq. Understood to have housed the bodies of important city officials, they are mixed with caves that may well have been used as temporary accommodation for those who were grieving or paying their respects.

A little further away is the open-air theatre, a Romanesque structure that was actually constructed by the Nabataeans before the Romans ever arrived in the city. While now badly deteriorated, it is mostly carved from

You'll need to trek up 800 steps to reach the Monastery, but the effort is well worth it





The Urn Tomb is one of the best preserved tombs hewn into the sandstone cliff and dates back to about 70 CE

“THE LEGEND IS EVERY BIT AS EXCITING AS ANY VISIT TO PETRA”

solid rock, and it can hold a crowd of some 8,500 people, who would sit facing north and east in order to shield their eyes from the glare of the sun. The theatre would have played an important role in Nabataean life, and you can imagine it as an area bustling with life.

And yet death was never too far away, it seems: there are more Nabataean tombs dotted around, including the immense Palace Tomb with its huge facade, four burial chambers and five stories, as well as the Urn Tomb, which was likely built in 70 CE. The latter was adapted into a Byzantine church in 446 CE, centuries after the Romans – who adopted Christianity in 324 CE – took power in 106 CE. There really is a sense of evolving history in Petra.

It's such a shame that so much has been damaged. A wander down the Colonnaded

Street, for instance, is one of strict imagination since this principal shopping avenue – six metres (20 feet) wide – would once have been a hive of activity, particularly so at the market. The nearby Great Temple, too, now a major archaeological site, would have been a splendid sight when it was constructed, although much is left to inspire a sense of wonder. It is likely to have been a seat of government, and was adorned with beautiful art in keeping with the Nabataeans' love of sculpture and frescoes, seen in the use of elephant heads and well-carved pilasters.

Even further along is the Qasr Al-Bint temple, constructed in 30 BCE by the Nabataeans. Unusually for Petra, it is free-standing and reaches a height of 23 metres (75 feet) with marble staircases and ornate statues. It is one of Petra's best-preserved structures, a fascinating complex that continues to unearth gems thanks to ongoing excavations and restoration.

A trip to Petra is incomplete without a visit to Ad Deir, however. Known as the Monastery, it is 50 metres (164 feet) wide and 45 metres (148 feet) tall with a doorway opening to a majestic height of eight metres (26 feet). It is carved from the rock and served as a tomb



LOCATION Jordan

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1985

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

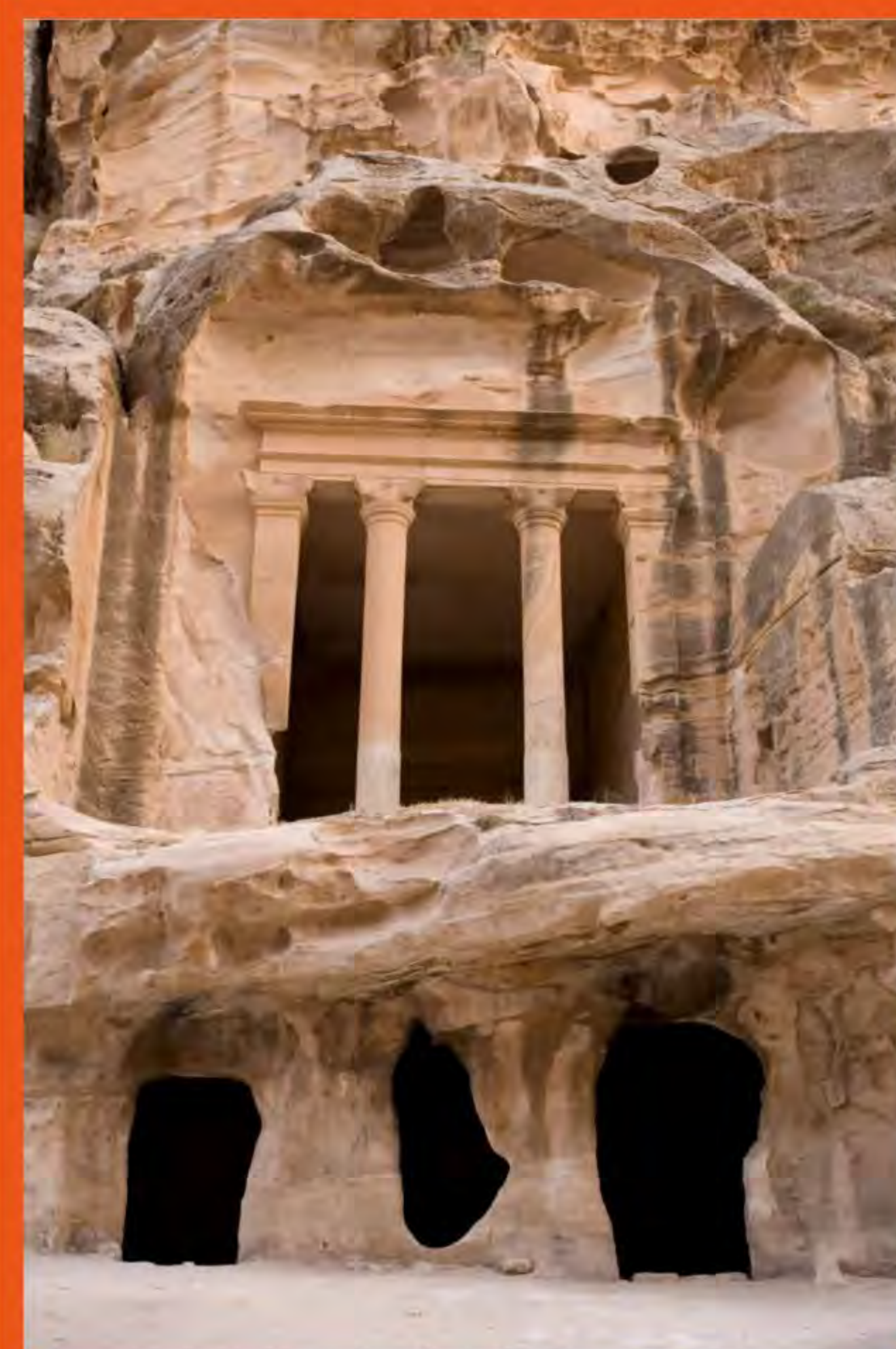
CRITERIA (i), (iii), (iv)

TOP TIP You'll need a single-entry visa to enter the country, which is valid for a month.

AFRICA & THE MIDDLE EAST

of a Nabataean god-king. It is arguably more impressive than the Treasury, which is quite some feat, but testament to the delights of his ancient caravan-city of Eastern traditions and Hellenistic architecture.

Just learning of the intricacies will astound: in 2016, the forgotten gardens of Petra were found once again, and showed a complex irrigation and water-storage system that not only allowed the gardens to flourish in the desert, but also fed fountains, a pond and a swimming pool up to 44 metres (144 feet) in length. Far from being a dry land, it even appears there were trees. Petra really is a city of discovery.



LITTLE PETRA

Travel away from Petra itself and you will come across Little Petra, or Siq al-Barid. It's a smaller and much quieter site but, like Petra itself, it has buildings carved into the sandstone and a wonderful sense of history.

The most likely explanation for its existence is that it was a place of rest for the caravans that headed to Petra from around the Middle East and the Mediterranean. As such, it had tombs, water channels and accommodation, and it is a chance to glimpse the real Jordan, some three miles off the more-beaten track.

In 2010, ancient Hellenistic-style wall paintings, once covered with centuries of grime, were finally revealed in Little Petra. Discovered in a dining area, principal chamber and recess, they show flowers, insects, people and birds, adding to the huge number of astounding tourist attractions in the area. Should you visit Petra, you must add them to your itinerary.

VICTORIA FALLS

TAKE THE PLUNGE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA AT THE WORLD'S LARGEST WATERFALL

Before you even reach Victoria Falls – the spectacular 108-metre (354-foot) waterfall on the Zambezi River in southern Africa – you will see huge columns of spray rising some 500 metres (1,640 feet) into the sun-kissed air. You'll also hear the incredible thunder of the water as it cascades over the lip of a large basalt plateau. Little wonder the original name for this unique sight was Mosi-oa-Tunya, which literally means 'the smoke that thunders'.

Victoria Falls got its current, most widely used name thanks to the Scottish missionary and explorer David Livingstone back in 1855, in honour of Queen Victoria. It straddles the border between Zambia and Zimbabwe, where it is bound by low sandstone hills, and it turns what is a generally placid river into a pounding torrent as more than 500 million cubic metres of water plunges into the gorge.

As such, it's something of a natural foaming monster that oozes beauty not only in its own

inherent splendour, but also in the rainbows that it forms thanks to the dazzling sunlight. It can be a little frightening in its scale, but there are inviting spots close by for the brave, particularly on the Zambian side near to the 'devil's cascade', where you can enjoy a crystal-clear, natural swimming pool.

There is also a jaw-dropping bungee-jumping location if you're feeling particularly daredevil. For this, you'd join around 50,000 people each year in leaping from a British-built steel road and rail bridge overlooking the waterfall, cutting through the magical mists as you hurtle towards the Zambezi River, saved only by the rebound of the cord as the adrenaline pumps inside your body.

For the less brave, the curtain of falling water can be merely observed as you wander along a path that cuts along the forest edge, pausing at the Knife Edge Bridge for a perfect view of the Eastern Cataract and the experience of the upward shooting spray. A rain coat is a useful accessory, as is a head for heights since you'll be 128 metres (420 feet) above the river. Meanwhile, in the dry season, there is also a chance to walk along the top of the Eastern Cataract and enjoy the same view Livingstone had way back when.

For the rest of the year, there is no such opportunity, as the water roars at its splendid best. But hike down the gorge, underneath the Victoria Falls Bridge, and you'll be able to see the cascading water from the base – a spectacular viewpoint, although it's certainly not a journey for the unfit since it takes you across some hazardous terrain, and involves some swimming and rafting.

A good alternative is to take a helicopter ride to see the falls in their glory from above or visit the various museums to get a sense of history in the area. The Victoria Falls Field Museum reveals the formation of the falls and the heritage of the region, while the David Livingstone Museum houses a huge range of memorabilia, from authentic maps to diaries.

LOCATION Zambia & Zimbabwe

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1989

TYPE OF SITE Natural

CRITERIA (vii), (viii)

TOP TIP A visa is needed to cross from Zimbabwe and Zambia.

Local African tribes were frightened of the Victoria Falls, but it is one of the seven natural wonders of the world





As the trading hub flourished, its inhabitants built increasingly magnificent monuments to their wealth



PALMYRA

KNOWN AFFECTIONATELY AS THE 'PEARL OF THE DESERT', PALMYRA WAS AN ANCIENT METROPOLIS UNLIKE ANY OTHER

Emerging from the Syrian wilds, northeast of Damascus, are the ruins of the ancient city of Palmyra. With a history stretching back to the origins of civilisation, it remained the beating heart of world commerce for centuries. Sitting on the crossroads east and west, the city was famed for its unique blend of Greek, Roman and Persian culture.

Inhabited since 7500 BCE, this fertile patch grew into a thriving farming settlement, christened Tadmor, or 'date palm'. In the 1st century CE, the Romans formally seized the city from the Arameans, transforming it into a caravan town.

Left largely autonomous, it grew into a major hub on the trade routes linking Persia, India and China in the East, to the Roman Empire in the West. During the 2nd and 3rd centuries, everything from silk to slaves and ebony to ivory passed through the burgeoning city.

Merchants began building magnificent mansions, statues and palaces as monuments to their newfound wealth, seamlessly fusing traditional Syrian architecture with Graeco-Roman and Persian influences – a stylistic nod to the melting pot of cultures that now inhabited the city.

The colossal Temple of Bel was embellished with reliefs of its namesake god, beside two other deities, representing the Sun and the Moon, in addition to flowers, fruits and leaves. A grand, colonnaded street, 1,100 metres (3,600 feet) long linked the temple to the city's other monuments, including the Camp of Diocletian, the Agora and the theatre. Buildings were abloom with bilingual inscriptions in Greek and Palmyrene Aramaic, which snaked elegantly around doorways and columns – sometimes accompanied by Latin. Found among the thousands of inscriptions were dedications to Phoenician, Babylonian, Canaanite and Arab gods.

In the 3rd century, when the Palmyrene king died, supposedly by poisoning, his industrious wife Zenobia took over as Queen Regent. Not content to serve as a Roman vassal, she declared independence, before seizing the Roman bread baskets of Syria, Egypt and Palestine, carving out a mighty Palmyrene Empire. Zenobia would later be defeated by the Roman emperor, Aurelian, who paraded her bound in chains.

In 634, the city fell to legendary general, Khalid ibn al-Walid. It remained a significant

LOCATION Palmyra, Syria

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1980

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (ii), (iv)

TOP TIP Due to the ongoing conflict in Syria, Palmyra is not currently safe to visit.

trading post on the Silk Road until a string of earthquakes saw the once-magnificent city largely abandoned. Submerged for centuries beneath sand and earth, the stunning ruins were rediscovered in the 17th century. During the Syrian Civil War, the terrorist group ISIS occupied the historic site, and deliberately destroyed many of its ancient wonders. With the world lamenting the loss of some of its greatest treasures, a dedicated programme of restoration work has begun, aiming to reclaim its heritage for the generations of tomorrow.

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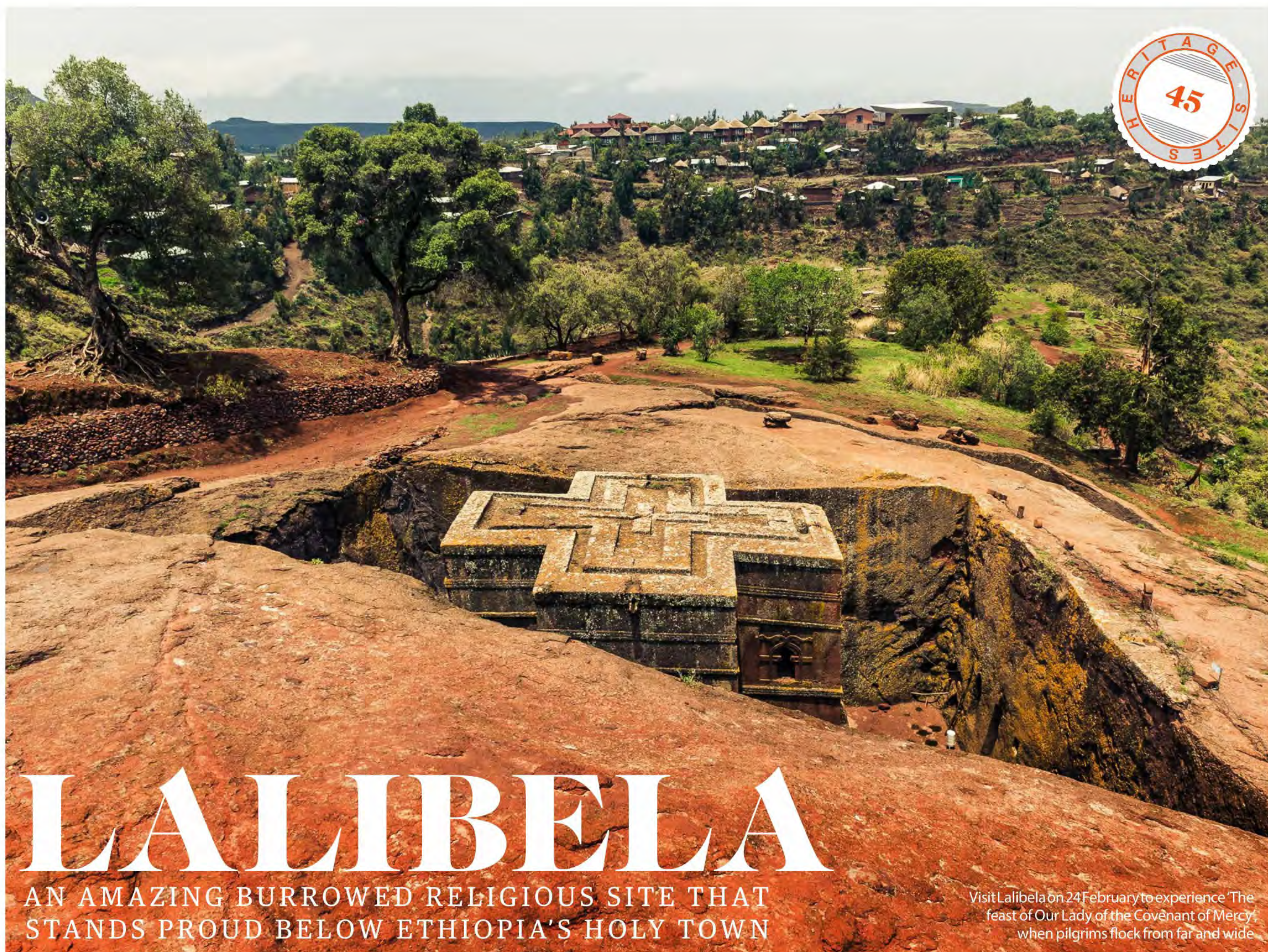
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LALIBELA

AN AMAZING BURROWED RELIGIOUS SITE THAT STANDS PROUD BELOW ETHIOPIA'S HOLY TOWN

Visit Lalibela on 24 February to experience 'The feast of Our Lady of the Covenant of Mercy', when pilgrims flock from far and wide.

To understand the significance of Ethiopia's Lalibela, you must first understand its history. In the 12th century, King Gebre Mesqel Lalibela set out to construct a 'new Jerusalem'. The decision came about after the Muslim conquests had halted Christian pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Approximately 645 kilometres (400 miles) from Addis Ababa, 11 medieval monolithic churches were hewn from the living rock of monolithic block doors, windows, columns and floors. Roofs were also chiselled out, forming this gigantic project, which was further completed with an extensive labyrinth of drainage ditches, trenches and ceremonial passages, including some that had openings to hermit caves and catacombs.

The churches were separated into two main groups: five were built on the north side of the river Jordan, while another six were constructed on the south side. The 11th church – Bete Giyorgis, or the Church of Saint George – is isolated from the others, but connected via a system of hand-carved trenches. Today, the site is home to a large community of priests and monks.

Believed to predate Lalibela's 'new Jerusalem' by approximately 80 years, Yemrehanna Kristos, with its alternating wood and stone layers, is one of Ethiopia's best-preserved late-Aksumite buildings. Unlike Lalibela's holy maze, it was built, not burrowed, and most likely served as a blueprint for his structurally sound and beautifully detailed system. The whole building 'floats' on a foundation of olive wood panels, which keep it off the sodden ground.

If Lalibela is the crown of Ethiopian Christianity, the Bete Giyorgis is the central diamond of the district's religion. The building, which sits separate from the others, is a 15-metre-high (49-foot-high), three-tiered plinth in the shape of a Greek cross. It has been exceptionally preserved, and visitors can still admire the structural beauty of the building as though they had been born in the days of King Lalibela. The church's treasures are held in two 800-year-old, olive-wood boxes that are believed to have been carved by King Lalibela himself.

Sitting in a large courtyard containing three churches is the demure Bet Maryam. Dedicated

to the Virgin Mary, the building is small but beautifully designed and decorated. This church boasts the reputation of being the most popular among pilgrims, and some believe that it might have been the first built in Lalibela. If size matters to you, then try Biete Medhane Alem, which is more like a vast Greek temple than a traditional Ethiopian church.

There are many wondrous sights to be found in Lalibela, but for an authentic experience, visit on one of the many holy days to see the celebrations of Ethiopia's rich religious history.

LOCATION Ethiopia

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1978

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (ii), (iii)

TOP TIP Carry a head torch for the inevitable power cuts in Lalibela.



Khufu's colossal Great Pyramid lines up with those of his son and grandson, all the way to Heliopolis

EGYPT'S PYRAMIDS

TOWERING OVER THE EGYPTIAN DESERT, THE PYRAMIDS REMAIN ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST MYSTERIES

For almost five millennia, Egypt's pyramids have captured imaginations the world over. Rising from the golden desert, their captivating triangular silhouettes sit in eerie harmony with the night sky.

While more than 100 pyramids are scattered across Egypt, the most impressive lie in Memphis, on the outskirts of modern-day Cairo. Once a desolate wilderness with a smattering of simple tombs, it was here that the old kings of Egypt decided to immortalise their feats beneath the Egyptian sun.

Dominating the skyline, the Great Pyramid rises like a hulking behemoth, 147 metres (481 feet) high. Masterminded by the pharaoh Khufu (known as Cheops by the Greeks) in approximately 2570 BCE, the marvel

features a level of geometric, architectural and astronomical perfection unparalleled to this day. The only surviving Wonder of the Ancient World, it's one of the most important monuments in the history of humankind.

Today, the iconic pyramid houses Khufu's tomb, though its north face bears the scars of an ancient treasure hunt, by the 9th century caliph Abdallah al-Mamun. Inside, sinuous passages lead to the Grand Gallery, Queen's Chamber and the King's Chamber, which houses just one object – the rectangular granite sarcophagus of Pharaoh Khufu.

In the shadow of the Great Pyramid, lies the 144-metre (471-foot) Pyramid of Khafre, built for Khufu's son, Khafre (known as Chephren by the Greeks), who also commissioned the Sphinx. Next to that, the Pyramid of Menkaure was erected by Khufu's grandson, Menkaure (known as Mykerinus by the Greeks). Arranged in order of age and size, along a southwest axis, archaeologists believe that when first built, they were perfectly aligned with the North Star.

In addition to the galactic connection, an imaginary line runs along the southeastern corners of each pyramid, towards the temple of Re in Heliopolis. Together, the trio comprise the most daring, innovative and mysterious monuments the world has ever known.

A string of smaller satellite pyramids punctuate the Memphis desert, including the complex of Saqqara, which not only houses the first monumental stone building, but the world's oldest pyramid – the limestone step-pyramid of Djoser. The Dahshur pyramid field also hosts many obscure pyramidal structures.

Built at the dawn of recorded human history, the pyramids have stood for almost 5,000 years; an awe-inspiring symbol of the might and imagination of ancient Egypt. The original skyscrapers, they are giants in the minds of those who have witnessed their enduring glory.

LOCATION | Memphis, Egypt

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION | 1979

TYPE OF SITE | Cultural

CRITERIA | (i), (iii), (vi)

TOP TIP | The Great Pyramid's passages are narrow, so those suffering from claustrophobia should consider if it's for them.

Khafre, who built the Pyramid of Khafre, also commissioned the magnificent Sphinx





TIMBUKTU

Timbuktu's distinctive mosques recall the ancient city's golden age

DISCOVER THE PAST OF AN ANCIENT CITY THAT HAS DEVELOPED AN ALMOST MYTHICAL STATUS

Most commonly associated with the middle of nowhere, this far-away civilisation is actually located in the country of Mali in the Sahara Desert. Originally an encampment during the summer months for nomadic tribes, Timbuktu grew to become an important centre for trade due to its proximity to the Niger River on the Sahara's edge; it was a popular place for caravans of traders and their camels to stop and refuel. Today it is the transportation of salt from the mines in the desert that Timbuktu relies on.

For many hundreds of years Timbuktu was the Islamic world's centre of education, drawing thousands of scholars to the sandy school rooms inside its ancient mosques. Many papers and historic books are still housed here, although there are now only three mosques remaining. The Ahmed Baba Institute contained approximately 30,000 manuscripts and was an important centre for Islamic research. Unfortunately, many of these documents went missing following the occupation of Timbuktu by Islamist rebels.

The city has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1988. Sadly, just two years later it was added to a list of endangered sites. In

the same year a rebellion erupted among the Tuareg tribes of the region, an uprising that lasted until 1995. The city has held the Festival au Désert to celebrate the peace treaty that ended the conflict, however, security concerns still exist. Yet human actions are not the only threat to this city. Due to intermittent droughts and flooding caused by a lack of adequate drainage, plus the relentless assault of desert sands, the city is under constant threat.

The city's three great mosques (Sidi Yahya, Djingareyber and Sankore) are all in the Old Town, and stand as reminders of a more prosperous age, yet they too are under threat of desertification, despite frequent restoration.

It is said that you can walk across the city in an hour. There are camels and donkeys for transportation as well as taxis. It is well worth taking a trip to the Grand Marché, with its many stalls and shops selling handicrafts, Tuareg sabres, knives and traditional fare. From the roof of the two-storey market you get an incredible view of the whole city across to the desert. When you're ready to stop exploring for the day, there are hotels and hostels in the city and also camping sites for those who enjoy a night under the stars.

LOCATION Timbuktu Region, Mali

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1988

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (iv), (v)

TOP TIP January or February is the best time to visit as the weather is cooler.



Despite its remote location, the city still boasts thriving markets

©Alamy/Getty Images

FEZ

THE SPIRITUAL HEART OF NORTHERN MOROCCO SHOWCASES AN INSPIRING BLEND OF OLD AND NEW

Founded in 789 CE, Fez is the second largest city in the country, with a population of approximately 1.2 million. Old Morocco still shines through in its historic medina, with its sturdy walls, elaborate architecture, ornate carvings and lavishly decorated doors. Required by law, each neighbourhood has its own mosque, with over 400 in Fez alone. It is also home to one of the oldest universities in the world, the University of al-Qarawiyyin, founded in 859 CE.

There are many outstanding shops within the medina walls, and an afternoon exploring the souks is a great way to really embrace the spirit of Fez. A labyrinth of around 10,000 alleys boasts artisanal shops as well as markets and craft stalls displaying colourful rugs, leather goods, pottery and other trinkets.

The food scene here is truly incredible, with a melting pot of influences from Arabs, Ottomans and Turks to French and Moorish dishes. Street food is definitely the best way to experience Fassi cuisine.

Since medieval times, Fez has been home to thousands of skilled craftspeople, with countless examples of their work still on show. The Chouara Tannery is believed to be the oldest leather tannery in the world, and here you can watch items being dipped – a truly fascinating process to behold, even if the smell can leave a lot to be desired.

Home to not only one of the oldest forms of timekeeping in the world in the form of a water clock, Fez also boasts the largest museum of historic weaponry (Musée des Armes). Inside its walls you will find a staggering 16 rooms filled with historic weaponry and armour.

Stepping back outside, a visit to the Jnan Sbil, the city's enormous park, is another must for any visitor. Rich in vibrant flowers, palm trees and tropical foliage, it was formally part of the royal palace but is now open to the public and even hosts free concerts. The Fes Festival of World Sacred Music, which takes place in June, is perfect for any visitor looking to experience traditional entertainment and the cultural side of this remarkable city.

Accommodation in Fez is both plentiful and varied, with something for every budget. For those in search of luxury, the Palais Medina and Spa, located next to the Fez Borj shopping centre, offers panoramic views across the city.



The spice stalls of Fez are a kaleidoscope of colour



A view over the city at daybreak



LOCATION Northeast Morocco

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1981

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (iii), (iv)

TOP TIP Try to visit the ten-day Tissa Fantasia horse festival in October.



A decorative hat stall in Fez. The city used to be the only place where real handmade Fez hats were made, by local 'Trabshi' craftsmen

GRAND CANYON

MARVEL AT THE BEAUTY OF AMERICA'S MOST FAMOUS NATIONAL PARK

Surprisingly, the Grand Canyon doesn't set many records. It isn't the longest, nor the widest, not even the deepest. However, it is by far the most famous, so much so that many people simply call it The Canyon as though there were no others in the world.

Multicoloured layers of rock sink into the earth, forming a chasm that gives the impression it must have been created by tectonic plates tearing apart. However, this slice through the United States was created several million years – geologists still argue exactly how long ago – when the Colorado River meandered across what is now north Arizona. Erosion from the flowing water combined with the uplift of the Colorado Plateau to carve a mile-deep canyon. The rocks that are left behind were once covered by the waters of a warm, shallow sea or swampland, but now shimmer under the sun in a hot, dry desert.

The focal point of the Grand Canyon National Park, the Grand Canyon stretches for 446 kilometres (277 miles), reaches 29 kilometres (18 miles) at its widest and measures 1,857

metres (6,093 feet) at its deepest. Nobody will ever see the whole thing in one visit, but it is possible to take in the majesty and grandeur in a day or two.

The popular sites of the South Rim may be busy, but they draw the crowds for a reason. Grand Canyon Village, with a number of wooden buildings dating to the turn of the 20th century, gives a glimpse of canyon country in the final days of the American Frontier. From here, Hermit Road runs west for 11 kilometres (eight miles) to the stone-built Hermit's Rest. Those who are keen to hike a portion of the canyon will find this the easiest way to get their boots dusty: jump on board the free shuttle bus to Hermit's Rest and walk back to Grand Canyon Village along the Rim Trail. For those who prefer to see their natural wonders from the comfort of a seat, hop on and off the buses to your heart's content at the designated stops and viewpoints.

The quieter Desert View Drive, heading east from Grand Canyon Village, is the best way to escape the tourist hordes. This 40-kilometre (25-mile) road does not have a shuttle bus

“THE NORTH RIM IS THE IDEAL PLACE TO SEEK SANCTUARY FROM THE CROWDS”

The Desert View Watchtower is one of the best places to escape the crowds on South Rim



The multicoloured layers of the Grand Canyon rock strata plunge downwards for over 1.6km (1mi)

LOCATION USA

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1979

TYPE OF SITE Natural

CRITERIA (vii), (viii), (ix), (x)

TOP TIP Although South Rim is open all year round, be aware that North Rim closes during the winter months.

service so relies on visitors having their own wheels, but it includes six viewpoints and five unmarked pullover points. Don't miss Navajo Point and Lipan Point, two places where the dusky red layers of rock can be seen at their best. The road ends at the Desert View Watchtower, just beyond the stunning Tusayan Ruins. These are the eerie remains of a Puebloan village, first constructed nearly 1,000 years ago by around 20 Native Americans who called this land home.

Coachloads of tourists go no further than the viewpoints of the South Rim, but it's difficult to look down the steep walls of the Grand Canyon and not wonder what is down there. Bright Angel Trail, beginning in Grand Canyon Village, drops 1,340 metres (4,380 feet) over 13 kilometres (eight miles) to the banks of the Colorado River at the bottom of the cliffs. Given the nature of the descent, expect seemingly endless switchbacks and aching knees, although at least it's only another three kilometres (two miles) to the Phantom Ranch, the only lodge beyond the rim.



Only 16 kilometres (ten miles) from Grand Canyon Village as the crow flies, but a five-hour drive around the gorge, North Rim is the quieter side of Grand Canyon with only ten per cent of the park's visitors venturing across. It makes it the ideal place to seek sanctuary from the crowds. The north is also the colder side since it is around 300 metres (1,000 feet) higher than the South Rim. While those on the North Rim can be stood in falling snow, others far below might be sunbathing along the river bank.

It is now 150 years since John Wesley Powell led the first expedition through Grand Canyon in 1869 to explore an unknown section on American maps. Those who want to follow the trailblazing path of the pioneers should join one of the waterborne excursions leaving Lee's Ferry in the summer months. Itineraries range from a few days to a few weeks, and you can experience the Colorado River by whitewater rafting through rapids, peaceful paddling up little-known side canyons, and exploring Native American ruins only accessible by river.

But perhaps the best way to really appreciate the scale of the Grand Canyon is from the air. Scenic flights by helicopter and aeroplane leave from Grand Canyon Airport on South Rim, while others depart from Las Vegas, enabling visitors to Sin City to glimpse the Grand Canyon between trips to the gaming tables.

Passengers who are lucky enough to find themselves on board are able to marvel at the sheer immensity of the gorge, carved by the seemingly peaceful ribbon of river within it.

To limit noise and ensure passenger safety, the National Park Service limits the number of flights and no longer allows them to dip below the rim. However, some helicopter excursions do land within the canyon on the Havasupai and Hualapai Reservations, located outside National Park jurisdiction.

The Havasupai portion of the canyon is home to the spectacular waterfalls of Havasu

Creek, a tributary of the Colorado. For sheer beauty, this is one of the finest places in the region. The star attraction of the Hualapai Reservation is the Grand Canyon Skywalk, a glass-bottomed, horseshoe-shaped walkway that extends 21 metres (70 feet) over the rim. It may not be a comfortable experience for anyone afraid of heights, but the makers claim it will hold the weight of 70 Boeing 747s. Although if the glass did smash, expect a long fall – all those jets could all sit on top of each other and still not reach the rim, such is the depth of the most famous canyon in the world.

©Getty images

The Grand Canyon National Park was added to the UNESCO World Heritage Site list in 1979

RIM TO RIM

It's possible to take a number of different rim-to-rim hikes across the Grand Canyon, although it is not recommended to try it in a single day. Probably the best option is the 39-kilometre (24-mile) route along the Bright Angel and North Kaibab trails from Grand Canyon Village on South Rim to Grand Canyon Lodge on North Rim. The walk is breathtaking in every sense, but worth it. Alternatively, try the shorter (but still challenging) South Rim to South Rim trek along the South Kaibab trail to the river and back up along the Bright Angel.

Whichever way you go, keep an eye out for the rare California condor soaring high on the thermals. However, beware the weather. Hikers who leave the clifftops in the cold light of an icy dawn may be wearing thick coats, only to find themselves sweltering in dangerously high temperatures when they reach the bottom of the canyon.



The Colorado River carved the steep cliffs of the Grand Canyon over millions of years



INDEPENDENCE HALL

TAKE A TRIP BACK IN TIME TO THE BIRTH OF THE USA

There are no locations more sacred to the United States than Independence Hall. It was in this red-brick Georgian building in 1776, then known as the Pennsylvania State House (it was renamed Independence Hall in the 1820s), that 56 delegates to the Second Continental Congress issued an explosive document that rocked both sides of the Atlantic: the Declaration of Independence. That alone sealed the State House's place in the history books, but 11 years later another convention met at the State House to debate how their new nation was to be governed. After several months of discussion, the result was the Constitution of the United States.

Independence Hall is also where George Washington was offered command of the Continental Army, where Abraham Lincoln's body was hosted during its return to Illinois for burial, and where the League to Enforce Peace was founded, a forerunner of the United Nations. Hardly surprising, then, that it has become a place of pilgrimage for those interested in modern democracy.

Placed on a desk in the Assembly Room is the silver inkstand used to sign the Declaration of Independence, behind it is the Rising Sun

Chair, where George Washington sat as he presided over the Constitutional Convention. They are the only original items from the momentous independence era, the rest of the furniture has been reconstructed to show what the room would have looked like during the conferences. The atmosphere was heated, not just because the delegates were creating the framework of a new country, but because Washington ordered that the windows be kept shut during the sweltering summer sessions to ensure that nobody could eavesdrop on the debates. Benjamin Franklin tried to lighten the mood by repeatedly attempting to trip other delegates as he sat in his aisle seat.

The other room included in the guided tours – the only way to access the building – is the room that once housed the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, also presented as it was in the early years of the republic. But don't forget to explore as you step back outside. Independence National Park includes a host of other historic buildings including Congress Hall, first home of the US Congress; the cracked Liberty Bell, which stories (possibly incorrectly) suggest rang to celebrate independence; and a couple of dozen other buildings and monuments.

LOCATION Philadelphia, USA

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1979

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (vi)

TOP TIP On-the-day tickets go quick, so queue early or buy in advance.



The tall steeple on top of the clock tower is a later addition after the original wooden steeple became rotten



The Liberty Bell sits just a few metres from Independence Hall



The Assembly Room has been recreated as it was during the independence era





A setting sun highlights the rugged badlands of Dinosaur Provincial Park on the Canadian prairies

DINOSAUR PROVINCIAL PARK

PAY A VISIT TO THE HOME OF SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST IMPORTANT FOSSIL SPECIMENS

If you're fascinated by fossils, a visit to Dinosaur Provincial Park – roughly a two-and-a-half hour drive east of Calgary in Canada – should definitely be on your bucket list. The site is home to the fossils of more than 44 species and ten families of dinosaurs dating back 75 million years, which is the key reason for its listing as a World Heritage Site.

As most of Dinosaur Provincial Park is a natural preserve, you can only access the restricted areas on a guided tour. Tours generally run in May, June, September and October, so book far in advance to avoid disappointment. There are also interpretive bus tours and walks in the natural preserve, which will teach you more about the relevance of the site in relation to dinosaur history, allow you to see the rarer specimens, and discover more about the area's fascinating topography.

Speaking of topography, the park is also listed as a heritage site because it contains the largest badlands (dry terrain made up of softer sedimentary rocks and clay-rich soils eroded by the elements) in Canada. Exploring the winding canyons, vibrant hues and layers of sandstone is a must-do activity.

Dinosaur Provincial Park can take a couple of days to properly explore, given that it's essentially got three distinct landscapes – the dry mixed grass prairie; the badlands; and the riparian. The third riparian area is an endangered river edge habitat along the Red Deer River, home to cottonwood trees, shrubs and plenty of wildlife. If you're visiting with kids (or big kids), be sure to print off a checklist and guide of flora species (and dinosaur fossils) from the Alberta Parks website to take with you as you roam.

There are nearly 200 campsites on location to choose from, which give the opportunity to stay over and fully appreciate more natural sightings after many visitors have left. The best time for bird watching (there have been over 165 species recorded) is May-June; mid-June offers flowering cacti and September is best for colourful autumn foliage.

At first glance, Dinosaur Provincial Park may seem like a harsh desert environment, but you'll see a vast array of animals and more complete dinosaur skeletons than anywhere else in the world.

A pre-booked tour is the best way to experience the park, as guides will point out fossils



LOCATION | Canada

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION | 1979

TYPE OF SITE | Natural

CRITERIA | (vii), (viii)

TOP TIP | Book onto guided tours in the natural preserve far in advance of your visit.

LOCATION Pacific Ocean

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1978

TYPE OF SITE Natural

CRITERIA (vii), (viii), (ix), (x)

TOP TIP Flights depart daily to the Galápagos Islands from mainland Ecuador.



Marine iguanas are the only ocean-swimming lizards on the planet, and are just some of the incredible animals that thrive on the Galápagos Islands

THE GALÁPAGOS ISLANDS

THE ONLY PLACE ON EARTH WHERE YOU CAN MEET TROPICAL PENGUINS, GIANT TORTOISES AND BLUE-FOOTED BOOBIES

Early explorers called this volcanic archipelago 'Las Islas Encantadas' (The Enchanted Isles), and for good reason. Isolated from humans, over 966 kilometres (600 miles) west of Ecuador, South America, the extraordinary flora and fauna have evolved undisturbed. The results of 'nature's greatest experiment' captivated naturalist Charles Darwin; his observations of the Galápagos Islands in 1835 inspired his theory of evolution.

Many creatures are completely unique to the Galápagos Islands, and because they evolved without major predators, they aren't fazed when humans pay them a visit. Rare tropical penguins, marine iguanas (the only ocean-swimming lizards) and birds with bright blue feet are just some of the incredible animals that thrive there, but the most iconic of them all has to be the giant tortoise. The islands were even named after them, as Galápagos means tortoise in Spanish. Specimens grow more than 1.5 metres (five feet) in length and live for over 100 years – the longest lifespan of all vertebrates. You'll

find them taking a refreshing bath in the warm volcanic mud.

Amazingly, these islands were forged from a series of volcanic eruptions, millions of years ago. Darwin compared the dusty, desolate scenery to the infernos of hell, but to the modern-day observer, it's more like a prehistoric paradise. Crystal-clear waters, blue skies and a breathtaking selection of more than 2,900 species of marine fauna qualify this as one of the world's greatest snorkelling and diving destinations. If you're seeking undersea adventures, the best time of year to visit is during the rainy season, starting from as early as December to as late as June. Temperatures are warmer and the water is calmer, making for good visibility. Oddly, the dry season sees a drop in water temperatures and more cloud cover.

However, due to the islands' proximity to the equator, the climate is fairly consistent all year round. Temperatures range from 21 to 30 degrees Celsius (70 to 86 degrees Fahrenheit),

so there is no bad time to visit. Having visited more than once, TV legend and naturalist Sir David Attenborough recommends allowing a week to see as many critters as you can. "And if you tell the islanders that's how long you've got, they will make sure that you see all those animals," he once said in an interview.

Make sure you bring a camera (waterproof if possible) and plenty of spare memory cards to capture all the sights. Other essential items to pack are a light waterproof jacket, sturdy walking shoes to navigate the lunar-like landscape, and a reusable water bottle. Remember that the Galápagos Islands are a national park and number one on the UNESCO World Heritage List to protect its fragile ecosystem. For this reason, many parts are only accessible in the company of a guide, and both cruises and land-based tours are available. There are 19 islands – 13 large and six small – with a multitude of islets, but you don't need to visit them all to make the most of this natural wonder of the world.



The Canadian Rockies have thousands of kilometres of trails to traverse, either on foot or by bike



CANADIAN ROCKY MOUNTAINS

EXPERIENCE ADVENTURE, HISTORY AND NATURE IN
THE LANDSCAPES OF CANADA'S NATIONAL PARKS



Canoeing is a popular activity, that's made sublime by the Rockies' mountainous scenery

The Canadian Rockies are renowned for their scenic splendour and mountainous landscapes, studded with waterfalls, glacial valleys, lakes, canyons and icefields. The entire World Heritage Site is actually made up of four national parks (Banff, Jasper, Kootenay and Yoho) and three provincial ones (Mount Robson, Mount Assiniboine and Hamber), which provides an impressive area of 22,991 square kilometres (8,877 square miles) to explore. These seven parks are all aligned along the Continental Divide, which separates drainage basins of the Arctic, Pacific, and Atlantic oceans.

The Canadian Rockies attract millions of visitors every year and it's easy to see why. In winter, it's the perfect destination for snowsports. In the summer, you'll be spoiled by the choice of walks and outdoor opportunities on offer, including fishing, canoeing, swimming

and wildlife watching. You'll need a Discovery Pass to access many locations in the Canadian Rockies, but this is easy to get hold of – either ahead of time online or from a ranger in person.

One of the most popular destinations in the Rockies is Banff National Park, and its turquoise glacial lakes often feature on postcards and travel brochures. Banff plays host to a picturesque mountain town and village as well as abundant wildlife and trails, plus it was the flagship of the nation's park system. There are over 1,600 kilometres (617 square miles) of maintained trails in this park alone, including 360 kilometres (224 miles) of cycling trails.

Aside from being a beautiful landscape that's popular with adventurous types, the Rocky Mountains also contain the Burgess Shale fossil site and Precambrian sites of interest. These are home to the fossil remains of soft-bodied

marine animals and provide fascinating insights into the evolution of Earth (and its marine species). For geographers, the parks are also significant because they're an ongoing example of glacial processes and how the landscape and sedimentary rocks are shaped.

LOCATION	British Columbia & Alberta, Canada
YEAR OF INSCRIPTION	1984
TYPE OF SITE	Natural
CRITERIA	(vii), (viii)
TOP TIP	The official Parks Canada site (pc.gc.ca) has lots of advice for planning a trip.

YOSEMITE

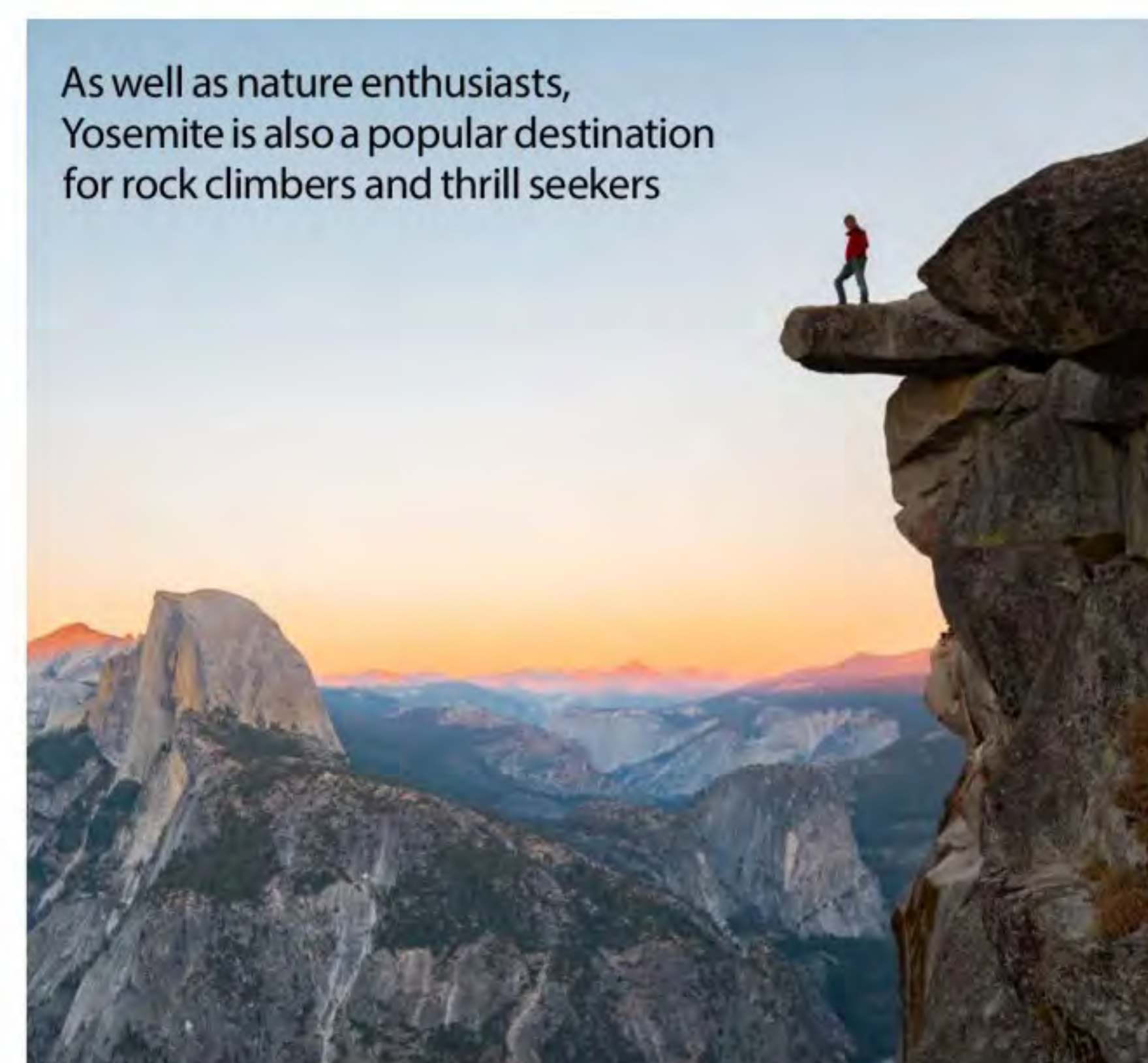


WHERE GRANITE MOUNTAINS CARVED BY ANCIENT GLACIERS PROVIDE A SAFE HAVEN FOR WILDLIFE

Part of the Sierra Nevada mountain range, this high-elevation park is known for its geology. The rocks in Yosemite today were shaped by ice that formed a million years ago. Glaciers are essentially frozen rivers that flow very slowly. They erode the landscape as they do so, and leave tell-tale landforms that remain long after the ice has melted. The famous Yosemite Valley is U-shaped, resembling a rounded tunnel through the mountains. This is the path left by thousands of years of ice flow. The glacier responsible for the formation of Yosemite Valley was 1,200 metres (4,000 feet) deep and its enormous weight scraped the rock away. Two remaining glaciers still adorn the peaks of the park's mountains and their seasonal melting is a vital source of water for the entire ecosystem in the warmer months.

Yosemite is famous for its waterfalls and contains the highest falls in mainland North America. Water pours off a hanging valley forged by glacier activity. Visitors with their heart set on seeing cascading water should visit in May as many waterfalls slow to a

As well as nature enthusiasts, Yosemite is also a popular destination for rock climbers and thrill seekers



LOCATION : California, USA

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION : 1984

TYPE OF SITE : Natural

CRITERIA : (vii), (viii)

TOP TIP : Drive to the top of Glacier Point for panoramic valley views or hike through cooling waterfall vapour on the gruelling Mist Trail.

The sheer rock face of El Capitan towers over the national park

“THE GLACIER RESPONSIBLE FOR THE FORMATION OF YOSEMITE VALLEY WAS 1,200M DEEP”

GIANT SEQUOIA FORESTS

More than 500 of these stand in Mariposa Grove near the park's south entrance. Also known as giant redwoods, these are some of the longest-living trees on the planet. The oldest ever identified had been growing for 3,266 years just 120 kilometres (75 miles) from Yosemite's boundaries. Visitors can walk through the grove among trees that could grow as high as 95 metres (311 feet). Their bark is fibrous and thick, protecting the tree from fire damage. Mature sequoia can disperse 400,000 seeds per year and were once widespread throughout seven counties of California. Logging activity in the past has impacted the tree's distribution, but guests at Yosemite can enjoy the grand trees at their leisure.



This tree is nicknamed 'Grizzly Giant' and is the 25th largest of its kind



Native Americans believed that standing in the mist of Bridal Veil Falls would help them find a partner



Evergreen pine trees line meadows and envelop the rugged peaks bathed in summer sun

trickle by late-August. The water that flows from the melting glaciers picks up nutrients on its journey down the mountain that enrich the habitat. The plant life flourishes and the park is lush and green at the start of summer. The arrival of autumn brings a dramatic transformation when the leaves turn vibrant amber. October and November combined account for only 13 per cent of park visits, so guests can enjoy the fall foliage in tranquility.

Yosemite is a world-renowned rock climbing destination. It takes some serious skill to shimmy up some of the park's more drastic inclines created by ancient rivers of ice. Climbers train for years to tackle El Capitan, a

sheer rock face extending 914 metres (3,000 feet) vertically into the sky. The current world record for scaling the granite monolith is held by a pair of American climbers. It took them only one hour and 58 minutes to reach the top. Competitive climbing is enjoyed by spectators all year round, so be sure to check famous climbing spots for a free show.

There are accommodation options to fit any budget, ranging from camping to lavish apartments. Visitors can rent kayaks, ride horses or go out rafting. Zipline through the stunning scenery or play a quiet game of golf in nature. Yosemite really does have something for absolutely everyone.



All of the bears in Yosemite are black bears, but can have auburn or blonde fur too

STATUE OF LIBERTY

THE GRAND LADY WELCOMING
DRIFTERS TO THE UNITED STATES'
LARGEST CITY



Other locations considered for Lady Liberty included Philadelphia, Boston and Central Park

© Getty Images

Standing proud in New York Harbour, the pale-green statue of Lady Liberty holds her torch high to enlighten the world and guide newcomers to the land of the free. Recognised across the globe as an icon of the United States, it comes as some surprise to discover that the Statue of Liberty is actually a French sculpture of a Roman goddess. When a French campaign to present a gift to the American people gained momentum in the 1860s, it was decided to erect a statue of Libertas, the Roman goddess of freedom, cast by copper smelters at a Parisian workshop and fixed to an iron frame designed by upcoming architect, Gustave Eiffel.

It's only after disembarking the ferry – boats run from Battery Park on the New York side of the bay and Liberty State Park on the New Jersey side – that the statue's immense size is properly appreciated. She's big, 46 metres (151 feet) to the tip of her torch, 93 metres (305 feet) if the pedestal is included. The 11-pointed star upon which Lady Liberty stands is actually an old fortification built to keep out the British during the War of 1812; when the French designers spotted disused Fort Wood they immediately realised it was the ideal location

because immigrant ships entering New York would have to sail past it.

Modern visitors can buy tickets to go inside the pedestal and statue, both of which have viewing platforms offering different perspectives of the monument and its surroundings. It's possible to climb all the way to the crown, although stairs are the only way to get there and tickets are limited. The narrow ascent that snakes even higher to the torch was permanently closed in 1916 after it sustained damage in an attack by German saboteurs.

Symbolism abounds. Lady Liberty carries a tablet that is inscribed with the date the American colonies declared independence. The seven rays on her crown symbolise the seven seas and seven continents, signifying that the USA welcomes the world. The statue has one foot slightly raised as though stepping over a broken chain partly hidden under her robes, a motif thought to refer to the end of slavery – still a divisive issue when the statue was completed in 1886, two decades after the end of the Civil War.

Divisive she is no longer. The Statue of Liberty is now beloved by Americans as a symbol of their nation.

LOCATION New York, USA

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1984

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (vi)

TOP TIP Wrap up in winter since sea breezes make the ferry and island chilly.



The pale green colour that's familiar today is the result of weathering and oxidation – for the first 30 years or so, it was a copper colour



The Monumental Axis is the central avenue of Brasília, lined with federal and civic offices

BRASÍLIA

EXPLORE ONE OF THE BEST EXAMPLES OF MODERN URBAN PLANNING FROM THE 20TH CENTURY

Brasília is the capital – as the name suggests – of Brazil, and is a site listed for its amazing landmark architecture and town planning. Brasília was created in the central part of the country between 1956 and 1960 as a joint venture between urban planner Lúcio Costa and architect Oscar Niemeyer. They were commissioned to build a new city from scratch by President Juscelino Kubitschek, as the aim was to move the capital from Rio de Janeiro to a more central location.

What the pair came up with was influenced by (and largely based on) the modernist movement set out in Le Corbusier's 1946 treatise *How to Conceive Urbanism*. As such, the architecture relies heavily on glass, grand scale and almost utopian structures.

The city's overall design features innovative buildings, but unlike many cities that have developed over centuries rather than years, even the administrative and office blocks have been built with imaginative elements.

The rough shape of Brasília has been likened to an aeroplane. While the curved Highway Axis runs from the north to southwest and links the main residential neighbourhoods, a straight Monumental Axis runs northwest to southeast

and is the central avenue in Brasília's city design. This long stretch is 16 kilometres (ten miles) long, and is lined with federal and civic offices, including the National Congress of Brazil and the 'Ministries Esplanade', so-called because of all the ministry buildings it houses.

Along the axis, you'll find the Three Powers Square – seat of the powers in Brazil – which is a popular plaza and spot for photographers at sunset. Following on is the Metropolitan Cathedral towards the end of the route, and one of the city's most iconic landmark buildings. Unlike classical religious houses, the stark white structure comes from the mind of curve-loving communist Oscar Niemeyer. The building is unique from the outside, though it's also worth visiting for its breathtaking interior stained-glass ceiling. Many tours of Brasília's monuments take in the cathedral, but check the itinerary before you book one to make sure.

Brasília is the only city built in the 20th century to be declared a World Heritage Site, and it was also named City of Design by UNESCO in 2017. Visit for yourself, and you'll soon become immersed in a city beautifully unified in its look, feel and vision.

The Cathedral of Brasília, designed by Oscar Niemeyer, was finally completed in 1970



The Palácio da Alvorada in Brasília is the official residence of the president of Brazil



LOCATION Brazil

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1987

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (iv)

TOP TIP Book a guided tour to see the best of the city in a short time.

REDWOOD NATIONAL AND STATE PARKS

DISCOVER THE TALLEST FORESTS ON EARTH, PLUS BEACHES, GRASSLANDS AND MILES OF SEASCAPES

This American park – as the name suggests – is defined by its majestic surviving remnants of coastal redwood forests. The World Heritage Site listing ensures the protection of this group of trees, which have been around for a staggering 160 million years (most redwoods live up to 2,000 years).

Redwood National and State Parks (RNSP) look after nearly 40,000 acres of ancient forest, almost half of all that remain now that 96 percent of the original old-growth coastal redwoods have been logged. Although the parks are famous for being home to the tallest trees on Earth, you'll also find oak woodlands, beaches, grasslands, wild streams, mountains

and nearly 64 kilometres (40 miles) of rugged coastline. This array of habitats means there's an amazing diversity of life to witness within the parks; in the ancient coastal redwood ecosystem alone, animals from black bears to sea anemones can be found among the giant redwoods and tidepools.

An enjoyable trip to this backcountry starts with a decent planning session, but happily most experiences don't require you to book in advance. It's possible to simply turn up, park up, and then enjoy the natural wonders. Outdoor-centric activities include scenic drives, hikes, cycles and ranger-led tours – think kayaking and fireside talks – plus

Elk are the parks' largest land mammals, and are likely to be seen at Elk Prairie Campground and Gold Bluffs Beach



Redwood National Park was created in 1968, to preserve the trees' coastal habitat and its native flora and fauna



interactive sessions for children at many of the visitor centres.

Seascapes aren't the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of RNSP, but the west coastal area is just as biologically significant as the forests. From Thomas Kuchel Visitor Center in the south (where most people stop to find out about the redwoods), short paths run directly to a wild beach, a freshwater lagoon or creek. Other gems further north include Gold Bluffs Beach and campsite, plus a bounty of shorter walks such as the Yurok Loop Trail.

The glorious coastline features steep, rocky cliffs broken up by gentle slopes, intertidal zones and rocky outcrops, which is a boon for bird watchers. Around half of the parks' species are marine-based, so look out for puffins, cormorants, gulls, and guillemots nesting on the sea cliffs.

RNSP is also a heritage site of culture. Native Americans have lived among the redwoods for thousands of years and still continue many of their practices today, keeping crafts alive, holding traditional ceremonies and hunting and fishing. Use official park maps to tailor your perfect redwood adventure.

LOCATION California, USA

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1980

TYPE OF SITE Natural

CRITERIA (vii), (ix)

TOP TIP It's free to drive through the park, although car parks require a small fee.



RNSP contains (and preserves) the largest remaining ancient coastal redwood forest in the world



Almost all of the island's moai were quarried and carved at Rano Raraku



RAPA NUI NATIONAL PARK

THE MOST REMOTE INHABITED PLACE ON EARTH, CHILE'S EASTER ISLAND IS HOME TO A POPULATION OF ENIGMATIC STONE STATUES

Emerging from the middle of the Pacific Ocean, thousands of miles from the nearest continent, is Rapa Nui, or Easter Island. Polynesian settlers washed up on this untouched isle around 1,000 years ago, and considered it so remote, they christened it 'Te Pito o te Henua' or 'The Navel of the World'.

Today, Rapa Nui National Park sprawls across 68 square kilometres (26 square miles) of protected wildlife area – almost half of the island. Within its bounds are the island's most famous residents: the moai. Between 1400 and 1650 CE, as the Polynesian population blossomed, they began building enormous statues, weighing 86 tonnes and stretching ten metres (33 feet) tall, to honour the dead. Named moai – 'to exist' – they were crafted from compressed volcanic ash.

Today, almost 1,000 moai dot Rapa Nui's grasslands, volcanoes and beaches. On the park's southeast coast sits Ahu Tongariki – home to the largest cluster of moai. Here, 15 statues stand atop a stone platform, which perfectly aligns with the rising sun during the summer solstice. Inland, Ahu Huri a Urenga,

hosts a single, lonely moai with four hands – which doubles as an astronomical observatory, thanks to a series of holes designed to collect rainwater and reflect the stars. Elsewhere, seven moai mark the site believed to be the island's birthplace, their hair arranged in fierce topknots – a tribute to the local belief that hair holds special powers.

In the park's northernmost reaches, the dormant volcano, Rano Raraku, rises from the horizon. It's believed that most of the island's statues were quarried and carved here, before being rolled atop tree trunks to their final resting places. Unfortunately, mass deforestation left the islanders without a means of transporting their beloved moai, and today almost half of the island's sculptures sit unfinished at the quarry.

Rapa Nui National Park is also replete with natural wonders and scenic hiking trails. The southeastern circuit slithers from Hanga Roa, past the Ana Kai Tangata cave, adorned with red, black and white paintings of menacing manutara birds, the symbol of the island's tangata-manu, or bird-man, cult. At the top

of the Rano Kau volcano lies the ceremonial village of Orongo, which served as a base for the annual bird-man competition. Each year, contestants would hurl themselves off cliffs and swim through shark-infested waters to a nearby islet, to find the first egg laid by the migratory sooty tern. Meanwhile, the northern circuit circumnavigates the impressive moai of Ahu Tahai and Ahu Akivi, as well as a network of underground caves.

LOCATION Easter Island, Chile

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1995

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (iii), (v)

TOP TIP When flying to Easter Island, book a window seat on the left side of the plane for unrivalled views.

LOS GLACIARES

MONUMENTAL GLACIERS MEET COLOSSAL PEAKS IN ONE OF THE MOST DIVERSE LANDSCAPES ON EARTH

Argentina's Parque Nacional Los Glaciares is a tale of two halves – the north, dominated by shark-tooth peaks and lenga forests, and the windswept south, bequeathed 350 glaciers and huge, milky sapphirine lakes. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1981, the park unfolds across 600,000 hectares (1.5 million acres) in the remote Patagonian Andes.

While giant ice fields cover 40 per cent of the park, the jewel in its icy crown is Perito Moreno Glacier. A remnant of the Ice Age – stretching 30 kilometres (19 miles) long and towering 70 metres (230 feet) above the glacial water – it grows by up to two metres (seven feet) a day. One of the only advancing glaciers in the world, it's also one of the most accessible, and can be observed from a network of walkways and

observation balconies that wind along the shore of Lago Argentino.

A jagged wonder, the chaotic field of ice plays out in shades of pure white, aquamarine, grey and electric blue. Occasionally, double-decker sized icebergs calve from its age-old crevices and spires – crumbling like icing sugar before crashing into the waters below. Boat trips ferry daring passengers to the foot of the glacier to experience the beguiling beauty of the ice up close. Yet, true immersion can only be had trekking atop the glacier itself. Snaking across bottomless blue cracks and chasmic caves, travellers don crampons to explore the ice on foot – the occasional creak [a lingering reminder of nature's powerful volatility. Truly adventurous souls, willing to test their mettle in one of the most difficult



The park is filled with fascinating flora and fauna



The park's rambling routes are well maintained, so hikers can explore solo



Strange cloud formations linger atop Perito Moreno, thanks to the microclimate caused by the sheer amount of ice

“LAGUNA TORRE WINDS ALONGSIDE THE FITZ ROY RIVER, THROUGH MAGICAL NIRRE FORESTS”

environments on Earth, can join ten-day expeditions across the little-explored Southern Patagonian Ice Cap.

To the north, in the shadow of the neck-straining Fitz Roy Massif, lies El Chaltén – the de facto trekking capital of Argentina. The ideal base for hikers and outdoors enthusiasts, the hippy enclave marks the starting point for a number of world-class trails – from relaxed, half-day routes to challenging full-day circuits. From the frontier-feel town, travellers can head straight out onto the trails after breakfast and return each evening to a delicious meal and warm bed.

The 22-kilometre (12-mile) Laguna de los Tres trail rewards generously with 360-degree grandstand views of Los Tres, or The Three: Poincenot, Cerro Torre and, of course, Mount Fitz Roy. Laguna Torre, another popular trail, winds 20 kilometres (12 miles) alongside the Fitz Roy River, through magical Nirre forests and old glaciated valleys, before reaching the foot of the majestically rugged Cerro Torre. Alternatively, several shorter and gentler trails, including Laguna Capri, Los Condores and Las Aguilas, are waiting to be explored. For keen campers, a sprawling network of multi-day trails weaves through the park's most remote corners, past hanging glaciers, the mighty

Patagonian ice field and unexplored valleys, like the Túnel, Eléctrico and Diablo.

No matter the trail, flora and fauna abound. Black and red Magellanic woodpeckers, chucao and white-throated caracaras flit through temperate forests, as the endangered, and painfully shy huemul deer forages for food below. To the north, Andean condors and black-chested buzzard eagles soar through the sky and compete for carrion while yellow orchids, bright red firebush and Calafate berries – which, as legend has it, anyone who eats is destined to return to Patagonia – bedeck the verdant woodland underfoot.

LOCATION Argentina

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1981

TYPE OF SITE Natural

CRITERIA (vii), (viii)

TOP TIP Explore the park's two largest lakes, Lago Viedma and Lago Argentino.



The craggy granite peak of Mount Fitz Roy stands at 3,375m (11,072ft) high

MOUNT FITZ ROY

Sandwiched between Argentina and Chile, the sky-puncturing peaks of Mount Fitz Roy are visible for miles. First summited in 1952 by French alpinists Lionel Terray and Guido Magnone, it was named after Robert FitzRoy, the meteorologist and captain of the HMS Beagle, who travelled to South America with Charles Darwin. Standing guard over Los Glaciares National Park, it's become the enduring symbol of Patagonia, made even more famous by Yvon Chouinard, who after summiting the mountain in 1968, used its outline as the logo for his clothing brand, Patagonia. One of the most inhospitable peaks in the world, a number of technically experienced, elite mountaineers attempt to navigate its sharp angles and sheer granite face each year, but on average just one succeeds.

QUÉBEC CITY



UNCOVER THE HISTORY OF ONE OF NORTH AMERICA'S OLDEST CITIES IN THIS LIVING MUSEUM

Perhaps more than any other place in Canada, Québec City is by far and away the French hub of the country. While nearby Montreal shares the region's Gallic charm, you only need to take a stroll around the streets of Old Québec to find a UNESCO World Heritage Site of 17th and 18th-century buildings that wouldn't look out of place in any major continental French city.

Like many who have visited, UNESCO was enamoured by Québec's unspoiled nature, and, in awarding the city its status, the organisation brought attention to the preserved ramparts and their bastions, gates and defensive works that surround the historic district. In many ways the city is a monument to the European colonisation of North America. It is a walled metropolis built with defence in mind that has taken obvious architectural inspiration from the Old World.

There are actually two parts to this former capital of New France: an Upper and Lower Town. The former is perched on cliffs and it was developed following the original settlement. Home to the most famous Québec sights, it includes Le Château Frontenac, a historic railway hotel opened in 1893 that dominates the view from practically any corner of the city below.

Also up high is the citadel, home to two museums dedicated to the history of Québec City and the war between the English and the French. Step within the walls of the castle and you may be lucky to witness the Royal 22s and the changing of the guard. The colloquially named 'Van Doos' (from the French for 22, 'vingt-deux') are the pride of the city, a regiment that goes back to World War I.

It's certainly striking how picturesque the Old Town and port are and, as you wander the cobbled and winding streets of Old Québec, you'll find yourself cast back to the fairy tales you were read as a child and wonder where you might find Prince Charming – or at least a frog prince – among the quaint boutique stores and restaurants, which still hang wooden plaques as though the 18th century never ended.

The Lower Town is centred around the Place Royale, home to the oldest stone church in North America, the Notre-Dame-des-Victoires Church. The square extends towards the first dwelling in Quebec and it's also the location of the Place Royale Museum. There's a bronze bust of King Louis XIV that dates back to 1686, too. With the harbour in this part of town, it gives a great sense of what early life in Québec was like.



Montmorency Falls is a 20-minute drive out of Québec City and stands at 84m (276ft) tall

LOCATION | Canada

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION | 1985

TYPE OF SITE | Cultural

CRITERIA | (iv), (vi)

TOP TIP | Old Québec is better suited to walking, but if you've had enough of that for a day then there's always a more romantic manner of transport – horse-drawn carriage.

© Getty Images

Le Château Frontenac was built for an American military assault that never came, meaning its pristine and ornate appearance remains intact



MESA VERDE NATIONAL PARK

A NEARLY MILLENNIUM-OLD CIVILISATION CAME TO AN END - WHO WERE THEY?

Spanning more than 202 square kilometres (78 square miles) with 5,000 known archaeological sites roped together by 64 kilometres (40 miles) of road, the Mesa Verde National Park is an enormous expanse of ancient dwellings. For almost 900 years, between 500 and 1400 BCE, it was the home of the Anasazi, a native American people.

The original Anasazi people who settled this region were basket weavers and lived in very modest housing called pit houses, essentially large holes dug into the ground with a central hearth, antechamber and storage. Four timber beams held up the thatched roof, where the entrance was located. Being dug into the ground gave protection from the punishing summer sun and cold winds of winter. Smoke-blackened walls around the complex tell of the chilling colds experienced for months at a time. Some of the original pit houses have been partly restored, which can be seen at the park today. With the shift from hunting to farming, prosperity in the region increased, which is

reflected in the composition of the buildings – they went from being made of mud to stone.

There are more than 600 cliff dwellings, the most famous (and largest) of which is the Cliff Palace. 75 per cent of the cliff dwellings have one to five rooms. The Cliff Palace has 150 rooms and 23 kivas (ceremonial spaces). At its peak, the palace housed 100 residents, but the peak did not last long. Less than 100 years later, it was abandoned. Researchers still don't conclusively know why, but evidence suggests severe drought and subsequent crop failures.

The best preserved cliff dwelling is the Spruce Tree House, which at 114 rooms and eight kivas is also the third-largest dwelling. The threat of rock falls forced its closure, but it can be seen from viewpoints at the Chapin Mesa Archeological Museum. Its interior walls were plastered in bright pink, brown, red, yellow, and/or white, but have mostly eroded away. Some murals have survived and, along with the few richly decorated mugs and surviving jewellery, offer tantalising glimpses into the

LOCATION Colorado, USA

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1978

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (iii)

TOP TIP The museum is 45 to 60 minutes from the park entrance, so make sure you plan your day well!

cultural history of a people who left no written records. The stories of the individual people who lived in these dwellings, of love, conflict, tragedy and happiness, are a mystery. What does remain, however, is their architectural brilliance largely still preserved, which does tell us a great deal about how this ancient people lived prior to European colonisation.

One cannot help but wonder who lived in the biggest cave dwelling in the world hundreds of years ago



WATERTON GLACIER INTERNATIONAL PEACE PARK



EXPLORE THE CROWN OF THE CONTINENT IN THE FIRST MULTINATIONAL PARK

With two separate national parks each snuggled up to the limit of their countries, it made sense for rangers to combine efforts at Waterton Lakes (in Canada) and Glacier (in the USA). The result was the first peace park straddling an international border, although the two are still administered separately by their own governments. With a combined 4,573 square kilometres (1,766 square miles), this is a substantial chunk of a rich ecosystem sporting snow-capped mountains, alpine forests, deep valleys and glacial lakes. Countless animals and plants call the wilderness home, including bears, wolverines, wolves and golden eagles.

The bulk of the parkland is contained within Glacier, a pristine, high-altitude landscape sporting few roads, although the best way to explore the spectacular scenery is still from the comfort of a car. The 80-kilometre (50-mile) Going-to-the-Sun Road crosses the park from east to west, passing sparkling glacial lakes and vibrant cedar forests in the lowland valleys, and climbing to bitterly cold alpine

tundra at the top of the 2,026-metre (6,646-feet) high Logan Pass. The high point of the road marks the continental divide, the point at which rainfall and rivers on each side flow to different oceans. Scenic viewpoints and lay-bys line the road.

The only border crossing between the two national parks can be found at Chief Mountain. Remember your passport and check the opening times – if you arrive after September, you'll have a long wait until it reopens again the following May. On whichever side of the border you find yourself, you'll be spoilt for choice with an abundance of walking and hiking trails. Expect to be accompanied by mountain goats, and watch soaring eagles, but keep a decent distance from the occasional grizzly and black bear.

Hiking highlights include the seven-kilometre (4.5-mile) path to Iceberg Lake and the shorter trail to Sperry Glacier in Glacier on the US side, and the more challenging and rugged Akamina Trail in Canada. Waterton's Crypt Lake Trail skirts the international border and then passes into the United States for less than 50 metres (160 feet), meaning hikers are actually illegally crossing the border. Thankfully there are no consequences beyond the thrill of imagining yourself a fugitive; a happy legacy of Waterton Glacier's pioneering cross-border peace park initiative.

LOCATION Alberta, Canada and Montana, USA

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1995

TYPE OF SITE Natural

CRITERIA (vii), (ix)

TOP TIP Consider using the free hop-on, hop-off shuttle bus across the Going-to-the-Sun Road.



The Temple of Kukulcán, aka 'El Castillo', at the heart of the Chichén Itzá complex, was built over an existing temple, circa 800-900 CE

©Adam Millward



CHICHÉN ITZÁ



EVEN THE WORLD'S MOST-VISITED MAYAN RUINS STILL HAVE THE POWER TO FIRE UP YOUR INNER INDIANA JONES

Some landmarks need no introduction. For many of us, the instantly recognisable stepped pyramids of Chichén Itzá have come to epitomise an entire civilisation.

While this remarkable survivor is most associated with the ancient Mayans, the site is, in fact, a rare amalgamation of Mayan and Toltec cultures – the latter, a contemporaneous empire from central Mexico, who preceded the better-known Aztecs. Theories abound to explain Chichén Itzá's 'split-personality' architecture – one being a Toltec invasion – but despite it being an economical and cultural hub for centuries, a dearth of evidence means we'll most likely never know for sure. All we do know is that by the 15th century, the city had been deserted to the jungle.

Of course, when visiting somewhere as iconic as this, there is always a risk of anti-climax, but thankfully that does not apply here. After buying a ticket for approximately 480 pesos (£17/\$23), a tree-lined path snakes its way to the Gran Plaza. This grassy clearing is dominated by the unmistakable 30-metre (98-foot) tall Temple of Kukulcán, or El Castillo. Despite being more than 1,000 years old, the

imposing structure with its 365 steps (one to mark each day of a solar year) remains in great condition. (Note that climbing it has been prohibited since 2006 after a fatal fall.)

While El Castillo may be Chichén Itzá's most familiar monument, it is far from its only treasure. The rest radiate out from the Gran Plaza in all directions, so there is plenty more to explore; be sure to wear comfortable shoes! To the north, a cobbled path hemmed by souvenir stalls leads to the Cenote Sagrado. This admittedly slightly underwhelming example of a water-filled sinkhole, which this area of Mexico is renowned for, is still worth a look if only to see where human sacrifices were once made to the rain god, Chaac.

Other highlights include the Juego de Pelota, a purpose-built arena for the Mayan ball game pitz and the largest example of its kind in Mesoamerica. On the opposite side of the plaza, spend some time wandering among the regimented columns of the Templo de los Guerreros ('Temple of the Warriors') complex, still standing sentry after centuries of service.

The western half of Chichén Itzá requires more imagination, as the structures are older

LOCATION Yucatán, Mexico

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1988

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (ii), (iii)

TOP TIP Stay in Pisté the night before your visit, so you can enjoy the site before the coach tours turn up.

and in worse shape, but the archaeological offerings are among the most interesting.

Here you will find one of the best-preserved friezes, rich with Mayan symbolism, on the Casa de las Monjas ('Nunnery') and the domed El Caracol ('The Snail') tower, one of the world's earliest known observatories. Art, religion and science, side by side, all preserved to this day for us to enjoy thanks to advanced engineering prowess – what better a spot to contemplate the progressive people who once called this illustrious city their home?

MACHU PICCHU

GRAB YOUR HIKING BOOTS AND YOUR CAMERA AND MARVEL AT THE ICONIC LANDMARK OF PERU

Machu Picchu is a historical site that many people consider the trademark stamp of Peru. Machu Picchu stands in all its glory at an elevation of 2,350 metres (7,710 feet). Granted a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983, the site of ancient Inca ruins is located 80 kilometres (50 miles) northwest of Cuzco, in the Cordillera de Vilcabamba of the Andes Mountains. Nestled above the Urubamba River between two steep peaks of Machu Picchu (old peak) and the Huayna Picchu (new peak), this ancient city laid undiscovered to the West until the early part

of the 20th century, when it was uncovered by Yale University professor Hiram Bingham in 1911 on an excursion by a local Quechua-speaking resident. Bingham had been in search of the 'lost city of the Incas'.

Now, the site is a famous archaeological maze that is commonly reached by tourists along the iconic Inca Trail. Each year, 75,000 people flock to the path in search of the Sacred Valley. The world-famous trek in South America is 42 kilometres (26 miles) long, and covers lush cloud forests, subtropical jungle, endless mountain views and Inca-paved ruins. However,

sadly, due to an increase in tourism this route has become well-trodden and today the park limits it to only 500 people per day to control the damage to the ecosystem. Bearing this in mind, it's worth checking out more sustainable and less congested routes up to the famous view. One of these options is the five-to-eight-day hike on the Salkantay Route through the mountains on the outskirts of Machu Picchu. If hiking is how you plan on reaching the panoramic view, then it's important to consider training in order to prepare your body for the physical demands of the hike. The high altitude and steep climbs can cause havoc for people uncustomed to it. Altitude sickness is a common problem and is caused by rapid exposure to low amounts of oxygen at high elevation. Some of the symptoms of this can include headaches, vomiting and dizziness



Marvel at the iconic view of Machu Picchu



LOCATION Peru

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1983

TYPE OF SITE Mixed

CRITERIA (i), (iii), (vii), (ix)

TOP TIP Don't forget your passport when purchasing permits, as it is required to secure your booking.

Embark on the road less travelled and hike up the Salkantay Route



Llamas are iconic visitors to the mountain, and have grown accustomed to living on the steep incline



“CONSIDER STOPPING OFF AT THE FAMOUS CITY OF CUZCO”

– all of which are not ideal when climbing up mountains. In order to try and prevent this from happening, it's best to put in some aerobic training beforehand, as well as partaking in local incline walks to help with building up strength in the legs. You might also want to consider stopping off at the famous city of Cuzco to allow your body to gradually get used to the altitude before embarking on your hike.

If you are short on time, then there are alternative routes to the top of the famous ruins, which avoid physical exertion and even breaking a sweat! Machu Picchu can be reached and explored within a day. During high season, which runs from May to September, it's imperative that day tickets are booked in advance as there is a limit of 2,500 permits per day that often sell out days before. These permits can be purchased from Dirección Desconcentrada de Cultura Cuzco via its website, or at the official office in Cuzco. The easiest way to reach the ruins is by train from the neighbouring station in Cuzco of Poroy, which runs directly to the small Andean town of Aguas Calientes. Once again, due to popular demand, it is best to book these train tickets in advance from Peru Rail or Inca Rail. To avoid missing out on a full day up at Machu Picchu, it is recommended that you reach Aguas Calientes the day before, as this gives you the opportunity to reach the summit by sunrise. From Aguas Calientes, buses run from as early as 5.30am, and it's a 25-minute ride up the side of the mountain to the site. If you are up for a challenge, there is an eight-kilometre (five-mile) hike up a steep mountainside path. It is only once reaching the top that you realise the full scale of the archaeological site. Upon reaching the summit, don't miss out on visiting the Sun Gate, or the Inti Punku. This is considered one of the primary features of

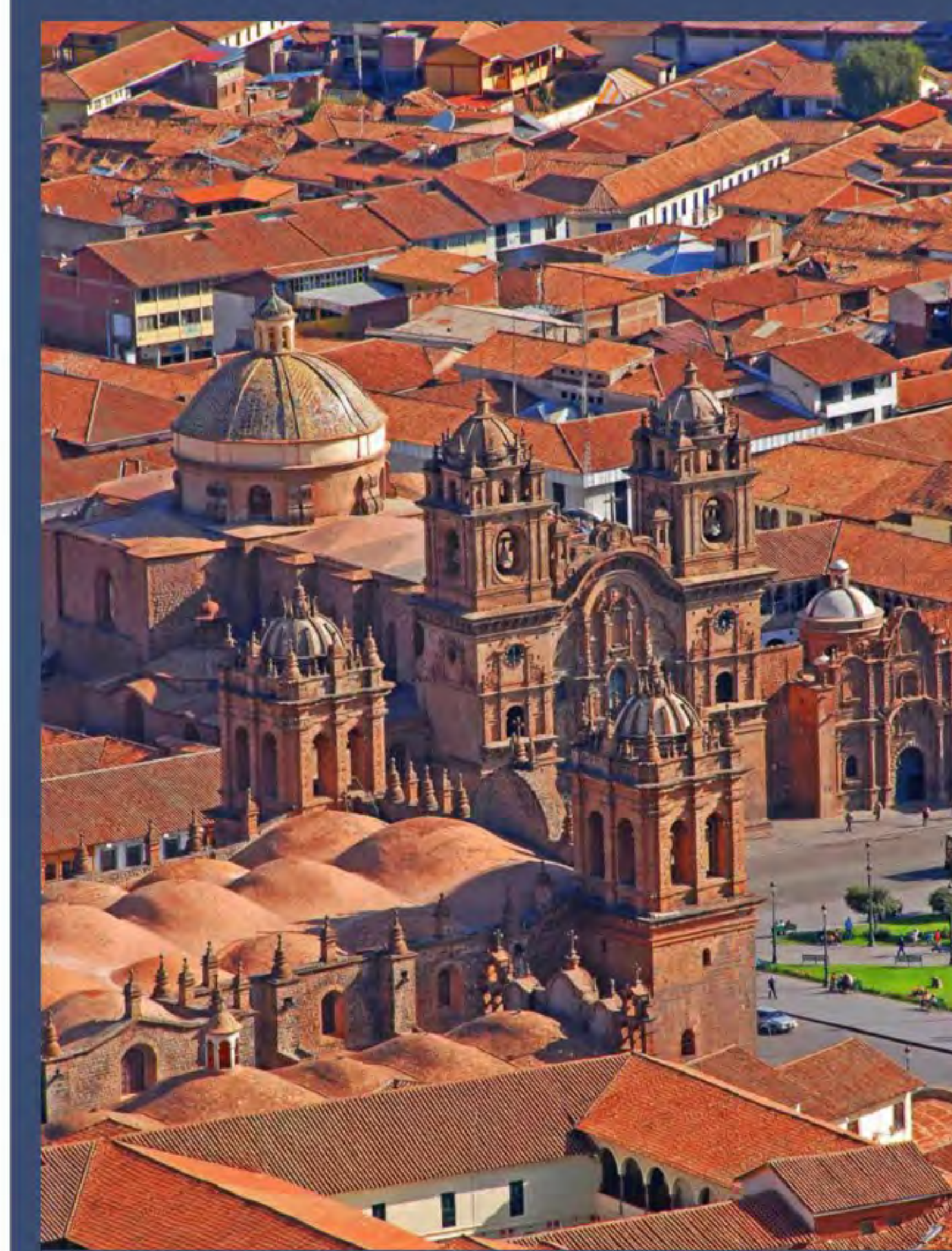
Machu Picchu, and from the top it boasts a panoramic view of the lost city. The stairs leading here are believed to have been the entry and exit point of those visiting the city. If you are up here early enough, head here for sunrise as it is a view that is not to be missed. However, the best view of Machu Picchu is from Huayna Picchu. This is reached by a steep trek and some scrambling, but doesn't require any climbing tools. Children over the age of 12 are allowed to climb the mountain, which is great news if you are travelling with children, as you can all marvel at the view of the citadel and the surrounding landscape together. Other noteworthy sites include the Inca Bridge, Watchman's Hut, the Funerary Stone, Temple of the Sun and the Royal Tomb of the Palace of the Princess. With so much to see, make sure you leave plenty of time to soak up the heritage of this wonder of the world.

Follow in the footsteps of the Inca Empire as you walk along the steps to the famous Sun Gate



CUZCO

Once the capital of the Inca Empire, Cuzco is still the beating heart of Andean culture, and an ancient town that should not be missed. Cuzco is also the famous launching point for many trips to Machu Picchu. One of the many reasons for this is to allow travellers to grow accustomed to the altitude, as the city itself sits at 3,399 metres (11,152 feet). It is also the oldest city in Peru, and provides a mix of Inca and Spanish architecture. If shopping is what you are after, then Cuzco is a mecca for textiles, jewellery and art. Make sure you visit the city's main market, San Pedro Mercado Central, and soak up the culinary culture and colour.



© Getty Images

Watching the sun rise over Machu Picchu is quite a special experience



The best way to see the geoglyphs is undoubtedly by air, and flights are available

NASCA LINES

RITUALISTIC SYMBOLS OR ALIEN ARTEFACTS? THEORIES ON THE ORIGINS OF THE NASCA LINES ARE VARIED

The arid desert that's 400 kilometres (250 miles) south of Lima is dramatic, but does not appear particularly remarkable at first glance. Walk around, however, and you cannot fail to notice the gigantic figures and lines that are carved into the ground. You can only get a rough impression from ground level, but there are various options for obtaining a better view.

Hills offer decent vantage points, but the best way to see the geoglyphs is by air – a flight in a small plane will cost up to £90 (\$125), but offers an incredible view of these enigmatic creations.

The figures and lines were produced during a 1,000-year period between 500 BCE and 500 CE. The majority were created by simply scraping away the top, darkened surface of the desert, exposing the lighter bedrock underneath. There are geoglyphs in many parts of the world, but none that match the Nasca Lines in terms of quantity and sheer scale – the entire site covers more than 450 square kilometres (174 square miles).

The lines fall into two broad categories: representational figures and simple lines or shapes. There are around 70 of the figures, depicting animals such as spiders, monkeys and humming birds, as well as a few abstract depictions of humanoid figures.

Less famous, but on a vastly different scale, are the lines themselves. The largest of the figures (the Guanay bird) is around 280 metres (920 feet) in length, but the lines can run for kilometres. Straight, curved, wavy – there are many different types, with some forming geometric shapes such as triangles.

Detailed study of the lines only started in 1941, and their scale (plus the fact they are best viewed from the air) has led to some outlandish claims about their origin and purpose. In 1968, Swiss writer Erich von Däniken claimed they were evidence of contact from an extraterrestrial race, and asserted that the lines were an alien airfield. Such theories are dismissed by the scientific community, with most agreeing that the lines and figures held ritualistic significance to the people who

created them, with possible links to astronomy or religion.

In truth, though, nobody can be certain why the figures were produced on such an epic scale, or what their actual purpose was. What is not in doubt is the importance of these creations to the native population. Unfolding over a 1,000-year history, they clearly held deep social importance for the ancient pre-Hispanic societies of the region.

LOCATION Nasca Desert, Peru

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1994

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (iii), (iv)

TOP TIP If a plane is too pricey, you could pay just 75p (\$1) to climb a 13-metre (43-foot) viewing tower.



COLONIA DEL SACRAMENTO

THESE CHARMING STREETS HELPED SHAPE THE FUTURE OF SOUTH AMERICA

The quaint and quiet Barrio Histórico (Historic Quarter) of Colonia might not seem like the kind of place that could shape the future of an entire continent, but in the 17th century, this small peninsula became a colony of significant strategic importance. For nearly 150 years, Colonia del Sacramento found itself at the heart of a battle for dominance between rival colonial powers and emerging independent nations.

Colonia del Sacramento was founded by the Portuguese in 1680, in a region that was otherwise dominated by the powerful Spanish Empire. It wasn't long before the Spanish colonists saw this Portuguese presence as a threat to their monopoly over trade in the region. To reassert their dominance, the Spanish bolstered their key trading post at Buenos Aires, just across the Río de la Plata, and later founded Montevideo to the southeast. But control of Colonia itself became crucial. The colony was captured by the Spanish in 1681, but its rule changed hands between the Iberian rivals a further six times until 1811. As

empires fell and newly independent states tussled for control, there was yet more back and forth until Uruguay became independent from the Empire of Brazil in 1828.

While Colonia has since expanded inland, the city's well-preserved Historic Quarter serves as a living reminder of its tangled past. Entering the district through the impressive wooden drawbridge is like stepping back in time. The colonial architecture here is a fusion of both Spanish and Portuguese styles, and – unlike the rest of the city, and most of the continent – its cobblestone streets follow the land in an organic layout, rather than a grid. The preservation of these unique features are what has earned Colonia its World Heritage status.

Remnants of the city's military past can be found throughout the district. Rusted cannons, which once famously fended off attempted raids by British privateers in 1763, still stand atop stone fortress walls. Had these attacks succeeded and the British gained a foothold in the region, South America may have become a very different continent indeed.

Colonia is about a two and a half hours' drive from Montevideo. Alternatively, it can be reached by ferry from Buenos Aires in less than one hour. Visitors can spend the day exploring the Barrio's historical museums and strolling along its picture-perfect streets. If you have a head for heights, a careful climb up the narrow stairs of El Faro Lighthouse is well worth the experience for the stunning views across the city and the river.

LOCATION Colonia, Uruguay

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1995

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (iv)

TOP TIP Don't forget to take your passport if you're visiting Colonia from Buenos Aires.

Colonia's cobblestone streets follow the land in an organic layout, rather than a grid





YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK

WELCOME TO THE WORLD'S FIRST NATIONAL PARK AND ONE THAT IS OF GREAT ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

LOCATION : Wyoming, Montana and Idaho, USA

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION : 1978

TYPE OF SITE : Natural

CRITERIA : (vii), (viii), (ix), (x)

TOP TIP : Be prepared to walk long distances when parking spaces are unavailable.

Ly ing on the borders of three American states and making up a huge 8,991 square kilometres (3,472 square miles) of conservation land, Yellowstone National Park (NP) is a spectacular place to explore. From a geological standpoint, Yellowstone NP has so many highlights. Seated on a volcanic hotspot, the park features more than half of the world's geysers – that's 500 in total – and is home to some 290 waterfalls, with the tallest being 94 metres (308 feet), known as Lower Falls on the Yellowstone River. What makes Yellowstone NP so special is that it's one of the few remaining ecosystems still intact today, and it contains

so many rare species of animals and plants that studies about ecosystems and natural processes provide us with a true insight into our natural world. With nearly 150 species of fossil plants identified in the park, it is a place for scientific study as much as popular tourism.

The numerous geyser basins throughout Yellowstone NP, including the Norris Geyser Basin and the Upper Geyser Basin, boast some of the most impressive features. The Steamboat Geyser, featured in the Norris Geyser Basin, is the world's tallest active geyser, and is formed of up to two vents (the north vent produces the tallest column). The

“STUDIES PROVIDE US WITH A TRUE INSIGHT INTO OUR NATURAL WORLD”

Yellowstone's Lower Falls is the tallest of the park's waterfalls, with a walking trail to the top being a must



THE NATURE OF WOLVES

Originally seen as a threat to livestock in the 1800s, wolves were eradicated over the course of the proceeding 150 years. This had a significant impact on other species in Yellowstone NP, with deer and elk numbers stretching beyond the park's natural capacity. As a result, trees were decimated by these animals, and other creatures such as beavers struggled to build dams with diminishing tree numbers. Something had to be done to return the park's ecosystem to normality, and with the reintroduction of the grey wolf back in the mid-1990s, among much controversy, the park's environmental structure is slowly getting back on track, with a flourishing beaver population as a result of the wolves.

top attraction among all the geysers is Old Faithful, a cone geyser that propels giant streams of water up to 56 metres (185 feet) into the atmosphere. Blowing every 35 to 120 minutes, this is a highly predictable geothermal feature. There are four types of thermal features that you can experience: geysers, hot springs, mud pots and fumaroles. The colourful Grand Prismatic Spring is the largest of the Park's hot springs, and the third largest in the world. This spring was named after its vibrant appearance, with a psychedelic mixture of yellow to orange hues surrounding its crisp blue water, much in the same way as a rainbow disperses light. To find the Grand Prismatic Spring, head to the Midway Geyser Basin where you can also find the Excelsior Geyser Crater and the Turquoise Pool; a hot spring that reaches temperatures of up to 72 degrees Celsius (160 degrees Fahrenheit). Yellowstone Lake is the park's largest body of water and is also North America's largest freshwater lake above 2,357 metres (7,732 feet) above sea level. At such high altitudes, parts of this tranquil lake can freeze over for more than half of the year. A main road skirts around the northern region, from the West Thumb and out towards the east entrance of Yellowstone NP. The large Mammoth Hot Springs complex is located in the upper region of the park and consists of brown to green travertine, formed thousands of years ago by limestone deposits made by the many geothermal vents.

There are five entrances into Yellowstone, making it possible to visit the highlights within a day's drive. However, staying more than two nights is recommended to be able to spend time at each location and to explore the surrounding wilderness to really be able to take in the park's impressive line-up of features. Hiring a car is the best way to get around, and being able to make stop-offs and detours is a



The rainbow-like colours of the Grand Prismatic Spring decorate the landscape, making this a natural sight not to be missed

All Images © Getty Images

bonus. If you're lucky enough to spot a brown bear roaming through the wilderness then be prepared to spend some valuable time trying to photograph the awe-inspiring creature in its natural environment (without getting too up close and personal in the process!).

The important roles of other species in the park, such as beavers, is beyond ecological doubt. Beavers are nature's engineers, relying on tree species such as willows and aspens to form their dams. With the re-introduction of larger predatory animals, such as wolves, the deer and elk populations have been reduced, making less competition for wood for the beavers to create their dams that control river flow and reduce erosion. The studies behind ecological processes within the park have given Yellowstone a tremendous significance in the natural world. The continued monitoring of the conditions and impact of tourism to the park is essential, and there have been concerns about numerous developments that might be impacting on wildlife movement. Making sure Yellowstone's ecological communities remain intact is of vital importance.

Tourism reaches its peak in the summer months, but the park can be admired all year round. You'll want to return to spot new wildlife, natural wonders and unexplored territory.

Visiting the park in the winter means you can avoid the crowds around amazing geysers such as Old Faithful



QUITO

STUNNING HISTORICAL ARCHITECTURE
ON THE INSIDE, A DRAMATIC
MOUNTAIN RANGE ON THE OUTSIDE

Dramatically set high in the Andes, with the volcano of Pichincha providing a jawdropping backdrop to the city, Ecuador's capital, Quito, is a city that will delight you with a variety of stunning sights. It's acclaimed by UNESCO as being the "best-preserved, least altered historic centre in Latin America". It draws attention to its mix of indigenous art with Spanish, Moorish, Italian and Flemish influences.

To get a great view of the city, you can visit an important symbol of Quito, the winged Virgin Mary, located at the top of El Panecillo. Alternatively, jump on the TelefériQo cable car for a ten-minute ride to the top of Cruz Loma. From that 4,100-metre (13,000-feet) vantage point, you can stare in awe at the surrounding mountains and the city nestled far below.

Get stuck into the city itself by exploring Quito's historic district. Consider starting off in the Plaza Grande, where you'll find the Presidential Palace. From here, you can roam off into cobbled streets to enjoy the Old Town's incredible colonial architecture.

There is a bounty of beautiful churches vying for your attention in Quito – so make sure you visit at least some of them. From the Plaza Grande, you're a short hop from the 17th-century Compañía de Jesus. The Spanish Baroque style of the exterior is already something to behold, but just wait until you get inside. The church's interior is lavishly decorated, with gold covering almost every centimetre of the place.

The Basílica del Voto Nacional is also not far from the historic Old Town, showcasing

a Gothic style where gargoyles have been substituted for Ecuadorian wildlife. Here, enjoy the spectacle of its huge stained glass windows, or the view from the top of its tower.

If you're looking for museums, Quito won't disappoint either. La Capilla del Hombre is a creation of Ecuadorian artist Oswaldo Guayasamín, dedicated to the people of Latin America and the world, and the suffering they have had to endure. The art exhibit features murals and sculptures and is located next to a museum with a larger collection of Guayasamín's work.

We'd also recommend the Museo Nacional. It is a huge repository of Ecuadorian art and contains many fascinating pieces going back as far as 12,000 BCE, giving you a fascinating look at Ecuador's culture and history.



The winged Virgin Mary looks over Quito's historic Old Town

Climb to the top of the Basílica del Voto Nacional for spectacular views



LOCATION | Ecuador

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION | 1978

TYPE OF SITE | Cultural

CRITERIA | (ii), (iv)

TOP TIP | A free walking tour leaves from Community Hostel, Pedro Fermin Cevallos at 10:30am Monday to Saturday.



Willemstad adds a Caribbean twist to the Dutch colonial buildings on its waterfront



WILLEMSTAD



EXPLORE A LITTLE SLICE OF EUROPE IN THE CARIBBEAN SEA

The idyllic island of Curaçao is situated in the southwestern Caribbean Sea between its sister islands Aruba and Bonaire, and makes up part of the Dutch Antilles. Layered in history and home to a melting pot of cultures, this hidden gem is a picturesque paradise.

Over the course of history, this island has been ruled by many nations, resulting in a wide range of languages being spoken here, including Papiamentu, Dutch, English and Spanish. This varied mix of cultures has enabled a rich food scene to flourish, with fish tacos, pumpkin pancakes, patties and goat meat all widely eaten.

The island was conquered by the Dutch in 1634, and the colourful colonial buildings and waterfront in Willemstad are testament to the island's vibrant nature. The name Willemstad is derived from Willem II, Prince of Orange (1626-1650) of the Orange-Nassau dynasty. As for the Curaçao name, this is said to come from the Portuguese word 'coração', meaning heart, perhaps a nod to the island's place in the centre of a trading hub.

The port town of Willemstad was added to the prestigious UNESCO World Heritage List in 1997. Approximately 700 buildings in various districts around the city are deemed to be

of historical interest, many of them unique examples of European colonialism. Willemstad also offers an impressive art scene, museums, hidden caves with Caquetío cave paintings, diving, snorkelling, and excellent hiking trails and mountain biking in the Christoffel National Park, an 18 square-kilometre (seven square-mile) preserve.

Another striking feature is the Queen Emma Bridge. Connecting the districts of Punda and Otrobanda, this iconic structure is fondly known as Swinging Old Lady. It measures 167 metres (548 feet) and thanks to the 16 pontoon boats that support it, it floats gracefully over the Sint Anna Bay.

Known for its beaches, pristine sand and stunning views, this Caribbean island lies under the 'hurricane belt', which means it's very rare for the island to be affected by these fearsome cyclones. It gets little rain and grows few crops, leaving the landscape more desert-like than tropical. Even so, the island is not without some interesting natives, including iguanas that in many places outnumber the locals. Although a protected species, they have been introduced to the menu following an agreement between the government, farmers and restaurateurs.

LOCATION Curaçao, Caribbean Sea

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1997

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (iv), (v)

TOP TIP Head to the Marshe Bieu (Old Market) for authentic Curaçaoan stews.

A visit to Willemstad will likely result in a meeting with one of the local iguanas. These natives are often seen lounging by hotel swimming pools



©Getty Images

HAWAII VOLCANOES

A LIVING, CONSTANTLY CHANGING NATIONAL PARK – AND IT'S STILL GROWING

LOCATION | Hawaii, USA

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION | 1987

TYPE OF SITE | Natural

CRITERIA | (viii)

TOP TIP | See where the lava meets the sea for a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Few things in nature inspire as much primal sense of awe as witnessing the raw power of a volcano, and in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, you can witness not one, but two of the most famous volcanoes on Earth. Kilauea is one of the world's most active volcanoes in historical times, and Mauna Loa is the largest shield volcano on the planet. It is these two volcanoes that make up Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, which was established in 1916 to preserve the rough natural diamond that is the southern part of Hawaii Island, the largest island in the Hawaii archipelago. Then again, 'preserve' might be the wrong word, as those two volcanoes have been reshaping and transforming the land around them almost continuously.

Watching the red-hot lava hit the cold sea is a stunning sight





Hawaii Volcanoes National Park is being constantly reshaped and transformed by frequent eruptions in Kilauea and Mauna Loa



The Thurston Lava Tube is a long, subterranean cave formed by ancient flowing lava

“THE BURNING-HOT LAVA INSTANTLY BOILS THE WATER IT COMES IN CONTACT WITH”

Kilauea has been erupting almost constantly since 1983, in what is called an effusive eruption, which is a non-explosive type of eruption. Instead of a big ash plume with massive amounts of tephra released into the air, Kilauea and Mauna Loa release hot, dense, flowing lava out through multiple cracks and craters around the park, which flow like rivers of burning, melting rock. These rivers often end up flowing into the ocean, where you can witness dramatic displays of

the lava meeting the cold seawater, resulting in massive plumes of steam as the burning-hot lava instantly boils the water it comes in contact with.

It goes without saying that all visitors to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park must take extreme care when travelling there. The park's website is frequently updated with current volcanic activity, which can and often does result in closures of one or more parts of the national park. The reason is obvious –

Kilauea's last eruption took place in December 2020



THE END OF A 35-YEAR-LONG ERUPTION

Kilauea is one of the most active volcanoes on Earth. In fact, it erupted almost continuously from 1983 to 2018. In 1990, it destroyed a town, and in 2018 there was a big spike in activity, resulting in the destruction of Vacationland Hawaii and a small community named Kapoho. However, in August 2018, after perhaps its most violent phase in decades, the eruption ceased, and was declared over in December 2018. However, in December 2020 a new eruption started on Kilauea's summit. The lava ran into a nearby lake, boiling off the water and forming a new lava lake. Despite occasional lulls in activity, you can rest assured that Hawaii Volcanoes National Park will continue living, breathing and constantly reshaping itself.

the entire park is directly on top of two big volcanoes, and new fissures can open up almost anywhere within it, often with little notice. Any safety notices must be adhered to without fail because careless visitors can easily find themselves in danger if they don't – indeed, there are recent examples from 2018 and 2019 where tourists who ventured into closed-off areas were seriously injured.

There is a variety of activities available to park visitors. This includes a crater rim drive tour, which incorporates a stunning view from an overlook point at Kilauea, various hiking routes and programmes, and even classes where you can learn many skills mastered by Hawaii natives and learn about the rich history of Hawaii and its people.

GREAT WALL OF CHINA



WITNESS THE REMARKABLE LANDMARK THAT STARTED OUT OVER 2,000 YEARS AGO

One of the most iconic sights in the entire world, a visit to the Great Wall of China constitutes the trip of a lifetime and it's located just an hour and half from Beijing – ideal for those who wish to escape the hustle and bustle of the city for a day trip.

The beginnings of the Great Wall began between the 8th and 5th centuries BCE, when different ancient Chinese states started to construct their own fortifications. This continued into the Warring States period until the first emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang of the Qin dynasty, connected the walls during the 3rd century BCE in order to prevent invasion from the north.

The Wall was then developed by the subsequent Han dynasty in order to protect the flourishing Silk Road trade, before the Ming dynasty incorporated watchtowers and fortresses into the Wall between the 14th and 17th centuries CE to create a stronger defence, while restoring the older parts of the Wall. Some parts have crumbled over the centuries, either due to natural causes or human destruction, and most of what you see today was built by the Ming dynasty.

The Wall was known as 'the longest cemetery on Earth' because of the number of workers who were killed during its construction. Stories emerged that their bodies were later buried in the Wall, although there is no evidence to suggest this is true.

Though the purpose of the Wall was to stop enemy invasions, it unfortunately failed to prevent them. The first Great Khan of the Mongol Empire, Genghis Khan, managed to breach the Wall to seize Northern China during

the early 13th century. His grandson, Kublai Khan, completed the Mongol conquest of China when he defeated the Song dynasty in the South in 1279.

The Great Wall of China stretches across northern China and southern Mongolia, and is made up of many individual sections. The most popular sections for visitors are in Jinshanling in the east, Badaling in the west, and Mutianyu, which is close to Beijing. For a peaceful section, try Huanghuacheng. Many volunteer trips take place near Beijing.

The Great Wall is perfect for hikers, with recent estimates suggesting it is roughly 21,000 kilometres (13,048 miles) long. If you can't stomach the length, the Wall can be explored at any point. Depending on the part you wish to visit, you can reach it by bus, train or car.

If you're after an adrenaline rush, the Mutianyu section of the Great Wall, which can be reached via foot, chairlift or gondola, has a toboggan slide that takes around five minutes to reach the bottom of the Wall. It is also a quieter section of the Wall, compared to Badaling, which is usually crammed full with tourists.

The Great Wall is also one of those dream sights that can be visited during any season, depending on whether you prefer summer or winter weather – although if you want clear skies, then autumn is probably the way to go. Millions of visitors arrive every year to look at, explore and walk the Wall, which is considered to be one of the New Seven Wonders of the World. With its fascinating history and cultural significance, the Great Wall of China is not to be missed.



Ancient Terracotta soldiers guard various sections of the Great Wall



The Mutianyu section has a toboggan slide that takes around five minutes to get you to the bottom of the Wall!

LOCATION China**YEAR OF INSCRIPTION** 1987**TYPE OF SITE** Cultural**CRITERIA** (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), (vi)**TOP TIP** Some parts of the Wall are very steep, so do your research before deciding which part you want to climb.

PRESERVATION

INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS OF THE GREAT WALL

One of the biggest and oldest independent organisations for the preservation of the Great Wall, it deals with the spread of information on the Wall's condition and projects to repair it. It works with China's State Administration of Cultural Heritage to help oversee the Wall's condition. Through WildWall, they run regular volunteer trips. Email william@wildwall.com or visit the WildWall Facebook page.

ABROAD CHINA

Abroad China's 'Clean the Great Wall of China' initiative is a conservation project that's looking for volunteers to help clean and rebuild sections of the iconic structure. As well as helping out in reconstruction efforts, there will also be opportunities to hike sections of the Wall. There will also be seminars with local experts on the history and cultural significance of the Wall. Visit www.abroadchina.net for more details.

BESPOKE TRIPS

Countless charities organise trips to the Great Wall of China, some of which involve helping with certain cleanup or restoration efforts. Keep in mind that these volunteer projects are usually quite expensive to take part in. Travel companies such as China Highlights (www.chinahighlights.com) also specialise in creating bespoke packages, including hiking both wild and restored areas of the Wall.



A stunning aerial
View of the Great Wall

“IF YOU CAN’T STOMACH THE LENGTH, THE WALL CAN BE EXPLORED AT ANY POINT”

©Getty Images

The Wall can be explored at any point, so you can travel to your preferred part by bus, train or car



The Registan – meaning 'sandy place' – is the centre of Samarkand's historic district



SAMARKAND

TIMUR'S REGAL CITY IS A STUNNING TURQUOISE GEM, DEEP IN THE DESERTS OF UZBEKISTAN

Samarkand's historic buildings are as beautiful as the Indian fabrics and Chinese silks that once flowed through it, on their journey across the Silk Road. This city in Uzbekistan and in the middle of the barren steppes and deserts of Central Asia, was built on the back of Silk Road trading wealth – but it took the vision of one terrible emperor to turn it into the cultural jewel it is today.

Timur (the real-life inspiration for Marlowe's Tamburlaine) was a ruthless warlord from the Middle Ages, who had absolutely no problem slaughtering anyone unlucky enough to be in his way. But he was also a man with lofty aspirations, and dreamed of turning the city of Samarkand into a new centre for Islamic learning and culture. By forcing great intellectuals and craftspeople to live in the city, he succeeded – travellers who came to Timur's Samarkand marvelled at how it exceeded anything they had ever seen before.

Now you can, too. Uzbekistan was once a place shrouded in mystery, so far behind the Iron Curtain that it was almost impenetrable. But since the dissolution of the USSR and the death of its harsh former president Islam Karimov, the country is now able to slowly reveal its treasures to the world.

And what treasures they are. The centrepiece of Samarkand is the almighty Registan, a public square surrounded by three stunning madrasahs (Islamic schools/universities). Beneath the blue domes, golden ceilings and perfect patterned tiles, great men from all across the Timurid Empire came to study the Quran, as well as mathematics, literature, poetry and art. Explore them for yourself and come back at night, so you can see all their colours enhanced by an incredible light show.

But the terrifying Timur is never too far away. The Gur-e-Amir (Tomb of the King) is his final resting place, and it's said he placed a curse upon all those who dared to enter it. In the 1700s, a Persian warlord broke the slab of green jade that marked Timur's crypt when he tried to steal it. After that, he seemingly had an awful run of bad luck, with his son becoming gravely ill. The warlord returned the stone to Samarkand and apparently his son recovered. The stone still bears the cracks from this attempted robbery, but don't worry – you shouldn't be affected by the curse yourself, if you simply wish to stand in awe of this brutal emperor and his surprisingly beautiful tomb.

As well as the historic sights, any visitor to Samarkand should seek out an experience

with Uzbekistan's unique culture. Look around a carpet factory and see highly skilled women at work, creating magnificent items with just their hands. Or sample some local food in one of Samarkand's many Uzbek restaurants – but be warned, it's not exactly suitable for vegetarians.

One of the best things about Samarkand right now is that it remains relatively undiscovered by tourists, but in order to marvel at this hidden gem all by yourself, you'll have to act quickly – a new high-speed rail network is making it much easier for foreign visitors to travel to it. So what are you waiting for?

LOCATION Uzbekistan

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 2001

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (ii), (iv)

TOP TIP Be sure to research the Uzbek visa process thoroughly – it can be complicated.

TAJ MAHAL



INDIA'S TAJ MAHAL IS AN ARCHITECTURAL MARVEL, BUT BEYOND ITS BEAUTY LIES AN INTRIGUING LOVE STORY



The Taj Mahal is perfectly symmetrical apart from the emperor's tomb, which was added in at a later stage

Legend has it that all the architects and labourers who worked on the Taj Mahal were killed or mutilated after its completion so that no other structure like it could ever be built – such is the magnitude of its beauty. Of course, historians have argued that there is no evidence to prove this is true, but it elevates its almost mythical status.

The Taj Mahal is not only a seventh wonder of the world and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, but with more than seven million visitors it is one of the most-visited landmarks in the world. Built from translucent white marble and ornately decorated with semi-precious gems, it's easy to see why.

Located just outside of Agra, the Taj Mahal stands on the bank of the River Yamuna. The site includes the main gateway, gardens, mosque, rest house and mausoleum. The architecture is a blend of Persian, Islamic and Indian styles. But the most notable aspect of its design is the use of symmetry and repetition. The tomb is the main focus, and it has four identical sides. The building that houses this, famous for its spectacular dome, is framed by four minarets. And there is symmetry in all its surrounds, from the gardens and reflective pool, to the shapes and patterns carved into the walls.

As you walk through the main gateway, the Taj Mahal magically appears, and the chaos turns to calm as you become transfixed. The real beauty, however, is in the craftsmanship: ornate geometric designs made out of pietra dura, and intricate flower sculptures carved into the marble; Persian poems and verses from the Quran etched into the walls.

But despite the Taj Mahal's grandeur, it's the love story behind the monument and not its aesthetics that makes visitors flock to see it. Mughal emperor Shah Jahan's wife, Mumtaz Mahal, died in 1631 giving birth to their 14th child. A year later, he commissioned the Taj Mahal in her memory. It is said the emperor was devastated by her death and promised to build her an eternal resting place. The name Taj Mahal is believed to be a shortened version of her name and translates as 'Crown of Palaces'. Whether you believe the love story or not, the Taj Mahal is definitely a jewel in India's crown.

LOCATION India

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1983

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i)

TOP TIP Agra is around 200 kilometres (124 miles) from Delhi, so day trips are possible.



The Imperial City of Huế is a testament to the might of the Nguyens, and the enduring Vietnamese spirit

HUẾ

HUẾ'S HISTORIC CITADEL IS TESTAMENT TO THE ENDURING VIETNAMESE SPIRIT

Just north of Vietnam's Perfume River, eight kilometres (five miles) inland from the South China Sea, is the city of Huế – a modern metropolis with a storied past. At the turn of the 19th century, having established the Nguyen dynasty, Emperor Gia Long shifted his capital from Hanoi to Huế. It was a strategic location, perfect for governing the entire realm, near the mighty Ngu Binh Mountain.

As the emperor began building his new citadel, the surrounding hills took on symbolic importance, with a 'blue dragon' and 'white tiger' to the left and right, serving as protectors to the main gate. Beyond, free from evil spirits, the Nguyens occupied what had historically served as south Vietnam's bureaucratic and military heart.

Each new building was meticulously aligned with the 'five cardinal points' of centre, west, east, north and south, as well as the five elements of earth, metal, wood, water and fire, and even the five colours that are yellow, white, blue, black and red.

The Huế Citadel would eventually host the Imperial Residence, the Hoang Thanh Imperial City and the Tu Cam Thanh Forbidden Purple City, alongside various royal residences. Set along the river, on the city's northeast, the

defensive fortress of Tran Binh Dai ensured total control over the river, while Tran Hai Thanh watched over the sea.

Beyond the city gates, Huế blossomed into a centre of spirituality. Every year, the emperor would ride an elephant south to Dan Nam Giao, or 'Esplanade of Sacrifice to the Heaven and Earth' – a beautiful tree-lined altar – to offer prayers. To the west, they established the magnificent Van Mieu, or 'Temple of Literature', as the country's foremost centre of Confucian studies.

Meanwhile, up river, they built an elaborate set of royal tombs, once again developed in conjunction with Confucian philosophy and geomancy, to ensure the ideal balance between the tombs and their natural surroundings, as well as celestial bodies and life force.

In 1885, despite the Nguyens' best efforts, French forces laid waste to the city, razing the library to the ground and stripping it of its treasure. After the 1968 Tet Offensive of the Vietnam War, American troops ravaged the city once again, buffeting it with bombs and napalm.

The citadel endures today, a symbol of not only the might of the Nguyen dynasty at the peak of its powers, but the indomitable Vietnamese spirit.

LOCATION Thua Thiên-Huế Province, Vietnam

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1993

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (iv)

TOP TIP For a truly immersive experience, visitors would benefit from hiring a knowledgeable tour guide.



The beautiful Hien Nhon Gate, one of the main gates to the Forbidden City

© Getty Images

MOUNT FUJI



ONE OF JAPAN'S MOST HISTORIC SITES, MOUNT FUJI IS A BREATHTAKING WONDER IN THE HEIGHT OF SUMMER

If you take the train between the Japanese cities of Tokyo and Osaka on a cold winter's day, when the thick clouds that often hang in the air have dispersed, you might be lucky enough to catch a rare but perfect glimpse of the picturesque Mount Fuji. A stunning centrepiece of Japanese culture standing proudly over the border between Yamanashi and Shizuoka Prefecture, it has captivated the world thanks to its stunning beauty from afar, but atop of Fuji's summit at 3,776 metres (12,388 feet), there is much to be discovered.

Fujisan, as it's known locally, was traditionally a site for pilgrimages and an inspiration for Japanese artists from around the 11th century. Added to UNESCO's World Heritage Site list in 2013, it consists of 25 sites that reflect its sacred cultural heritage. A popular location for walkers, you'll find historic pilgrim routes to explore, as well as shrines, Oshi lodging houses and natural volcanic features in what was once a centre of training for ascetic Buddhism.

Officially, Mount Fuji is open for climbing in July. However, it can be enjoyed on any given day in a much more leisurely way thanks to the Fuji Five Lakes region at the northern foot of the mountain, Hakone, a hot spring resort where visitors can bask in the naturally warm waters, heated thanks to the underground volcanicity, and two ski resorts that give visitors a chance to enjoy skiing alongside this vast natural and cultural wonder.

A trek up Mount Fuji is a popular leisure activity among locals, but also tourists who make up a third of visitors to the mountain every year. Only experienced climbers are advised to climb Mount Fuji in late June or September due to the temperatures at the summit plummeting to well below freezing. From October to around mid June, climbing to the summit is highly advised against due to extreme wind and weather conditions, snow, ice and a risk of avalanches. Specific trails will open on certain dates, with the Yoshida Trail

typically opening to the public on 1 July, while the Subashiri, Gotemba and Fujinomiya Trails open a week or two afterwards.

The path to the summit of Mount Fuji is divided into ten stations. The first station begins at the foot of the mountain, where paved roads lead the way to one of four 5th stations halfway up the mountain, which have varying altitudes and are for most the starting point of their ascent to the summit. Views up the mountain allow climbers to see across the major cities and landmarks of Japan, and are especially fantastic at sunrise. As you ascend the mountain, you will notice how the native flora varies as the altitude increases.

If you're concerned about the level of fitness needed to climb to the summit, have no fear, those with limited or no hiking experience are welcome, and the path is well sign-posted to warn of hazards. One thing is certain, once you've done it you'll never look at the postcard-picture image in the same way ever again.

© Getty Images

Japan's beautiful Mount Fuji is in fact a stratovolcano, although it hasn't erupted since 1707

LOCATION | Japan

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION | 2013

TYPE OF SITE | Cultural

CRITERIA | (iii), (vi)

TOP TIP | Make sure you come prepared with a good pair of walking shoes.



ANGKOR

WITH MANY HAVING BEEN REBUILT, ANGKOR'S TEMPLES IN CAMBODIA ARE MONUMENTS OF HUMAN AMBITION



The city of Angkor, which was once the capital of the Khmer Empire – the predecessor to Cambodia – is well known for having dozens of enigmatic temples. In combination, they form a body of architectural work that is unsurpassed in its scale and detail, a beautiful mix of Hindu-Buddhist iconography and a true testament to the burning ambition of the Cambodian god-kings, who showed great determination to build increasingly more impressive structures in a bid to showcase their might.

The largest of them all is Angkor Wat, a grand and meticulously preserved Hindu temple that positions itself as being at the centre of the universe, such is the weight of its significance. Built by Suryavarman II and dedicated to Vishnu in the early 12th century, its five towers can be seen from over a kilometre (half a mile) away, rising high into the sky as some kind of pointer to one of the world's largest religious monuments.

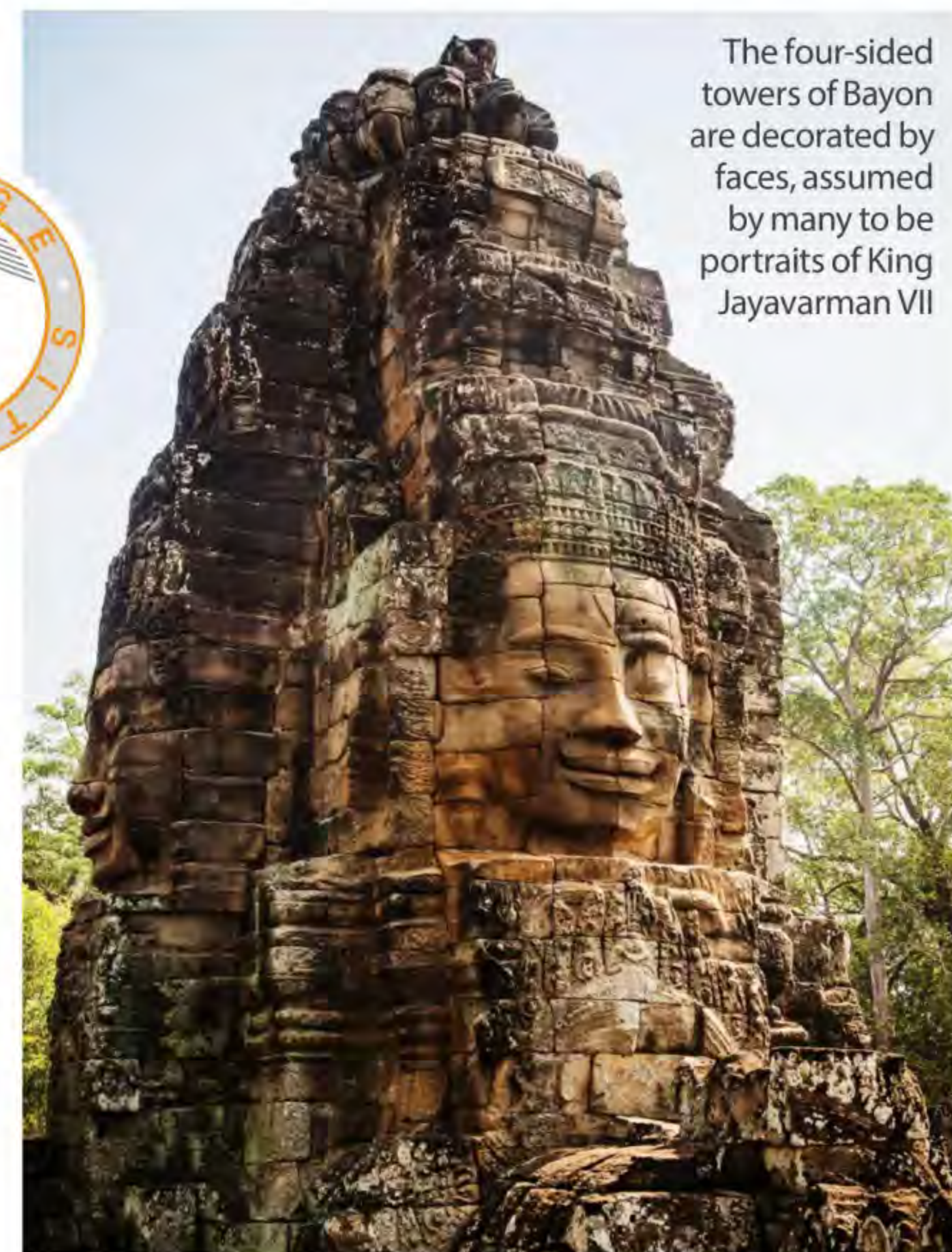
As a building, it represents Cambodia's heart and, situated about 225 kilometres (140 miles) northwest of the capital, Phnom Penh, this awe-inspiring complex has proven to be a survivor. It has been near-continuously used since it was built, and it has outlasted both the civilisation behind its construction

and the destructive rampages of the Khmer Rouge. They caused the Cambodian genocide of the 1970s and blasted bullets into Angkor Wat's walls.

Reached by crossing a large, deep moat lined with serpent-topped balustrades and built to re-create the image of mythical Mount Meru's five peaks, you'll encounter a large statue of Vishnu, which has been produced from a solid sandstone block, at the west gate. You'll then make your way along a wide avenue to the three-storey temple complex and look to enter the tower – a feat that's more difficult than you'd imagine. It is accomplished via a steep set of stairs, deliberately created at an angle of nearly 70 per cent to remind visitors that a climb to heaven is difficult. As you grip at the side ropes for your ascent, the adventure presses home the belief that gods resided at the top of a temple. Once there, prepare to be amazed some more.

Angkor Wat is strewn with once-hidden paintings and decorative pillars but, most importantly and a major draw, there are bas-relief carvings to a height of close to two metres (6.56 feet) that stretch for a couple of kilometres (just over a mile) – a major undertaking and a good sense of the size.

“YOU’LL SEE A STAGGERING 200 OR SO ENORMOUS STONE FACES”



The four-sided towers of Bayon are decorated by faces, assumed by many to be portraits of King Jayavarman VII

LOCATION Cambodia

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1992

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (ii), (iii), (iv)

TOP TIP Start sightseeing early in the day so you avoid the stifling midday heat.

Spanning all four sides of the outer walls, they are incredibly detailed and remain so a thousand years after they were created, telling the tremendous story of the battles between the gods and demons.

Venture away from Angkor Wat, and your jaw will drop even further. You should certainly head for the splendidly decorated Bayon, which takes pride of place in the last Khmer capital of Angkor Thom, where you'll see a staggering 200 or so enormous smiling stone faces beaming down on you from 54 towers. Created on the orders of King Jayavarman VII, it makes for a surreal state temple that, like Angkor Wat, incorporates a great many bas-reliefs. What makes it even more unusual is that it was dedicated to Buddha and built as a Mahayana Buddhist shrine. As the day goes on, shadows are cast over the faces, and it really has to be seen to be appreciated.

So too does Banteay Srei, created from red sandstone on a small site in the 10th century and dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva. It is located further away from the main group of temples, but it's worth venturing over for a look at the intricate and ornate carvings that it contains. Indeed, there is barely an inch that



In the Ta Prohm temple, kapok trees have found a way to suffocate the structures, producing an unusually compelling sight

hasn't been filled with decoration, whether a leaf motif or a devata – a female deity. It is all the more remarkable given that a god-king did not commission this. Rather, it was the order of a royal family tutor, or Brahman, and the fact that something so elaborate could be produced by such a person shows great influence and importance.

Preah Khan, meanwhile, is entirely different. It was commissioned by a king – Jayavarman VII – in honour of his father, and yet the fascinating thing about it today is not that it fused together Buddhist and Hindu temples

ANGKOR CITY

When the Angkor temples were discovered by Western explorers – notably Frenchman Henri Mouhot in 1858 – few people outside the immediate area in Cambodia had known of these monuments. But it became apparent that as many as a million people lived in the area, forming a huge city that, even today, we don't know the full extent of.

Although streets have been uncovered, discoveries continue. In 2016, for instance, archeologists from the University of Sydney took to the air in a helicopter and used remote sensing technology to map 958 square kilometres (370 square miles) around Angkor. By recoding variations in the smallest of details of the ground surface topography, waterways, highways and temples emerged.

It was rather remarkable, uncovering a significant lost city that once thrived and dominated for so many years. Suddenly, we learned of a sophisticated metropolis boasting wealth and technical know-how among its people – until climate change caused flooding, which sent the city into decline. Phnom Penh was the replacement.



Pre Rup is a temple mountain that means 'turn the body', suggesting funerals were held there

but that it has taken on a remarkable life of its own. Trees have grown into the temple and vegetation has enveloped the structures. But even that pales when you compare it to Ta Prohm, which – unlike most of the other temples that have been preserved and restored – has been left to nature.

To that end, Ta Prohm is perhaps the most fascinating of all, the roots of trees encasing the temple to such an extent that they are very much at one. It looks like something out of the mind of a fantasy-film director – a product of Tim Burton perhaps. But it's not. It's precisely what happens when a jungle encroaches and weighs heavy on what is now essentially a creaking structure. It's not very easy to get around, but this is much of the fun, exploring as you perhaps would had you come across it originally before other tourists learnt of its existence.

But that is the strength of the area: a chance to step back centuries and get into the mindsets of the ancients. In many ways, the smaller temples are more engaging – both Pre Rup and Banteay Samré are akin to miniature Angkor Wats with similar features and much to explore, only with the bonus of fewer visitors. Banteay Kdei is also away from the tourist trail, built in the Bayon architectural style and with more wonderful bas-reliefs to admire.

You should also find time for Phnom Bakheng, which pre-dates Angkor Wat and offers great views from its mountain vantage point. But whatever you choose to do, tackle them at your own pace and in a way that you don't become jaded or overwhelmed. By savouring the few that you decide upon, you'll unlock the magic of Angkor and come back refreshed and enthused with your stacks of awe-inspiring photos.

©Getty images



Angkor Wat is one of the biggest religious buildings in the world

THE FORBIDDEN CITY

JUMP INTO THE HEART OF CHINA'S IMPERIAL HISTORY IN ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST UNIQUE PALACE COMPLEXES

If you want to explore China's vibrant history, the Forbidden City is the place to start. While the emperors were ruling, you wouldn't have dared step inside – you probably couldn't have even tried with its 54-metre-wide (177-foot-wide) moat and ten-metre-high (33-foot-high) walls – but now the doors have been flung open and everyone can uncover Imperial China in all of its red and gold glory.

Nestled in the heart of the bustling capital of Beijing, on the north side of the famous Tiananmen Square, this sprawling palatial complex that covers 720,000 square metres was home to 24 Chinese emperors from 1368 to 1911. Opulently decorated, there are more than 90 courtyards, 980 buildings and more than 8,728 rooms in total, so as you can imagine, there's rather a lot to see!

Attracting 14 million visitors a year, there are bound to be a lot of people at the Forbidden City when you visit, but don't let that put you off. The

architecture alone is stunning, with the entire complex built to adhere to the Chinese practice of feng shui. The walls are painted a vibrant red – China's lucky colour – and the roofs are just one way you can tell the importance of each individual building.

The city itself can be split into three sections: the defences, the outer court and the inner court. As previously mentioned, an extremely wide moat runs around the entire complex, which was important in protecting against rebels and raiders. There are only four gates to enter, and the one that is most used is the Meridian Gate, which can be accessed through the Gate of Heavenly Peace on Tiananmen Square.

You'll then find yourself in the outer court, where grand ceremonies and state affairs were conducted. It's here that you'll locate the most important building in the whole complex: the Hall of Supreme Harmony, home to the magnificent Dragon Throne of the emperors.

The other two buildings you'll find here are the Hall of Central Harmony, where the emperor rested before grand events, and the Hall of Preserving Harmony.

When you continue on, you'll end up at a huge block of marble with cloud and dragon designs. Keep going straight and you'll find yourself walking through the Gate of Heavenly Purity and into the inner court, which was the main living area of China's famed emperors. Here you'll discover the Palace of Heavenly Purity, the leaders' sleeping quarters; the Palace of Union and Peace, where the emperors' seals were stored; and the Hall of Terrestrial Tranquility, the emperors' wedding venue.

Steeped in history and beautifully decorated, the Forbidden City really can't be missed on any trip to China or the Far East. With so much to explore, including a museum with many featured exhibitions, it should rocket to the top of everyone's list of places to see.

©Getty Images

LOCATION Beijing, China

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1987

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (ii), (iii), (iv)

TOP TIP It might take longer than you think to see everything, so make sure you give yourself plenty of time.



Only 40 per cent of the Forbidden City is open to the public, but that's more than enough to keep you busy!

The temple sits in Kedu Valley, where the gods allegedly planted a nail to keep the island from floating away

BOROBUDUR

ONCE ABANDONED, INDONESIA'S BUDDHIST TEMPLE OF BOROBUDUR IS NOW A LEADING PILGRIMAGE DESTINATION



Tucked within the heart of Java, the busiest of Indonesia's 17,500 islands, beneath the jungle overgrowth is one of the world's great archaeological marvels. It is a complex rooted in mystery, science and spirituality, built by a civilisation that believed in creating monuments befitting the loftiest of ideals. Stroll up the terraced mountain to be flooded with intricate carvings, depicting the toil of humans, the life of Buddha and the struggle to attain enlightenment.

This is Borobudur, an enormous temple built of 55 cubic metres (1,942 cubic feet) of volcanic stone, over a base of 123 square metres (1,324 square feet). A masterpiece of ancient design, it sits amidst the backdrop of central Java's Kedu Valley, near Mount Tidar, where the gods supposedly planted a nail to keep the island from floating away. The valley, nicknamed 'The Garden of Java' for its abundant fertility, is bookended by two volcanoes to the east, and two to the west – rising more than 3,000 metres (9,842 feet) high, bellowing smoke.

Built by the Shailendra dynasty in the 8th and 9th centuries, the colossal Borobudur is divided into three tiers; a stepped pyramid with five concentric square terraces and three concentric circles, topped with a stupa. The temple was rediscovered in 1815, having been abandoned and buried under volcanic ash for centuries.

Alongside temples at Pawon and Mendut, it forms a straight line; a large temple compound, and a pilgrimage path.

The largest Buddhist temple in the world, it was built at the base of a hill, levelled into a plateau, rising 15 metres (49 feet) above the surrounding plain. From base to stupa, Borobudur is adorned with one of the world's largest arrays of Buddhist reliefs, totalling 2,672. Elsewhere, 504 statues were scattered around the complex, with 72 small stupas holding one each.

Together, the structure of Borobudur represents the Mahayana Buddhist view of the universe; which is believed to be divided into three spheres: one where we are bound by our desires, one where we cling to name and form, and a final one where we hold on to neither.

The first level features 160 reliefs depicting Kamadhatu, a world of crimes of desire, such as killing, torture and theft. Meanwhile the second, the realm of Rupadhatu, boasts 328 Buddhas, along with 2.5 kilometres (1.5 miles) of Sanskrit manuscripts and 1,212 decorative panels. Finally, the stupa represents Arupadhatu – the highest plane – its simplistic design echoing purity of form, or formlessness. In essence, this represents the journey towards nirvana, with the stepped pyramid simultaneously reflecting an ancient Indonesian symbol of ancestor worship.

The volcanic building material for the temple was collected from rivers, cut to shape, brought to the site and, incredibly, laid without any binding material. Instead, the stones were connected by dovetails in horizontal connections and indentations in vertical ones – giving the temple flex. It is perhaps this dynamic construction method that has helped the temple survive an assault of earthquakes, decay and even bombings.

Despite its troubled past, Borobudur has risen from the ashes; today, a pilgrimage site not just for Mahayana Buddhists, but for wide-eyed wanderers from all corners of the globe.

LOCATION | Indonesia

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION | 1991

TYPE OF SITE | Cultural

CRITERIA | (i), (ii), (vi)

TOP TIP | Borobudur is just an hour's drive away from Yogyakarta in the Central Java province of Indonesia.

CHANGDEOKGUNG

ORIGINALLY DESIGNED AS THE JOSEON DYNASTY'S SECONDARY RESIDENCE, THE PALACE IS A MASTERPIECE OF KOREAN ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPING

Projecting majesty in bold red and green, complete with striking patterns, northern Seoul's palace of Changdeokgung remains a stoic reminder of its historic nobility. Built between 1405 and 1412 by the third Joseon king, Taejong, the complex was designed in accordance not only to Confucian principles, but Korea's indigenous Pungsu philosophy – which, like Feng Shui, correlates design to the flow of life force, prosperity and fortune. It features a striking array of Korea's distinctive Dancheong palette, drawing on blue, red, yellow, white and black, which aside from protecting from the elements and pesky insects, offer an air of distinction to the country's palaces.

Developed over a plot of 110 acres (46 hectares), the palace complex sits auspiciously at the foot of the 342-metre (1,122-foot) granite Mount Bugaksan – the city's tallest guardian mountain. Already using Gyeongbokgung

Palace as their official legal palace, the Joseon designed Changdeokgung as a secondary residence, in harmony with its natural surroundings – a complex where palace structures were placed south, and a stunning garden in the north.

Like all of Seoul's palaces, the complex burned down during Hideyoshi's violent invasion of Korea in 1592. However, after being rebuilt, it earned something of a promotion, becoming the primary royal palace, home to 13 kings over the course of 270 years.

As such, it has become the preserve of historic Korean royal life, where centuries of Machiavellian eunuch's whispers intermingle with the screams of feuding royal siblings. They echo through wooden buildings, set atop stone platforms, beneath tile-tipped roofs; adorned with a corbelled multi-bracket system and ornamental carvings, as intricate as they are colourful. These patterns include symbols,

intended to protect their hosts from fire and evil spirits.

Beyond the 15th-century, two-storey Donhwamun Gate lies Injeongjeon, the country's second-largest wooden building, filled with elaborate chandeliers, golden silk fringes and four-metre-long (13-foot-long) silken curtains.

To the north of the complex is the iconic Huwon, or Biwon, Secret Garden – spanning yet another 78 acres (31.5 hectares). Here, royals would sit exams, chat with courtiers, or escape the burdens of royal life in the embrace of 56,000 specimens of various species of trees and plants – from walnut and chestnut to ginkgo and pine – towering over pristine lawns, flower beds, a lotus pool and idyllic pavilions. A masterpiece, the palace went on to influence Korean architecture, landscaping and aesthetics for centuries, remaining the city's best-preserved complex of its kind.

The king's private library, 'where every kind of principle of the universe gathers', is hidden within the Biwon gardens



LOCATION Seoul, South Korea

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1997

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (iii), (iv)

TOP TIP Admission is free on the last Wednesday of every month, or if guests arrive in traditional hanbok attire.

© Getty Images



Gyeongbokgung Palace roof details



An aerial view of
Sigiriya Rock

ANCIENT CITY OF SIGIRIYA

THE DOOMED STRONGHOLD OF A TERRIFIED KING, THE IMPRESSIVE FORTRESS ON THE ROCK COULD NOT SAVE ITS CREATOR

The imposing nature of Sigiriya (Lion Rock) might in itself have been enough to earn a place on the World Heritage Sites list – rising above the surrounding jungle to a height of around 200 metres (660 feet), it is an awe-inspiring sight. Its importance goes much further than natural beauty, however, because in the 5th century, a king built a city on top of it.

Going to the trouble of building in such an inaccessible place suggests a deep motive, and sure enough there is a murky tale at the heart of the creation of the ancient city of Sigiriya. King Kashyapa I (477-495 CE) had just killed his own father in order to usurp the crown, and feared retaliation by his brother, the rightful heir. Building a fortress on top of Sigiriya promised to keep the new king safe, and he was soon established in his citadel.

Simply building a fortress would have been impressive enough, but Kashyapa I created a beautiful city, which is still admired for its planning and layout. Sadly, for the king, it was not impregnable, and his reign lasted just 11 years before the citadel fell and he committed suicide in 495 CE. The city was then turned

over to Buddhist monks, who occupied it until the 14th century, at which point it fell into ruin.

Discovered by Major Jonathan Forbes in 1831, it was gradually explored and restored, and visitors can once more ascend to the summit via the famous Lion Gate (two huge paws remain intact, but the large head that sat above the gate has crumbled).

As well as its colourful, if brief, history as a royal palace, Sigiriya boasts exceptional cave paintings, in the form of the 'Maidens of the Clouds'. Once numbering as many as 500, only 21 of these maidens remain. The site is also festooned with pieces of graffiti that have been inscribed over centuries, many of which are important cultural artefacts in their own right.

The garden complex of the city is considered to be of huge importance. Water storage facilities were incorporated into the design, to allow the city to hold out when under siege, while other elements are purely decorative.

Earning its designation on the World Heritage Sites list in 1982, Sigiriya is both a beautiful natural spectacle and a window into the ancient culture of Ceylon/Sri Lanka.

LOCATION Central Province,
Matale District,
Sri Lanka

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1982

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (iii), (iv)

TOP TIP Don't forget your
sunscreen. There is
almost no shade at the
top of Sigiriya.

***“THERE IS A
MURKY TALE AT
THE HEART OF
THE CREATION
OF SIGIRIYA”***

JAIPUR CITY

RAJASTHAN'S MONOCHROMATIC CAPITAL POSSESSES A COLOURFUL PAST

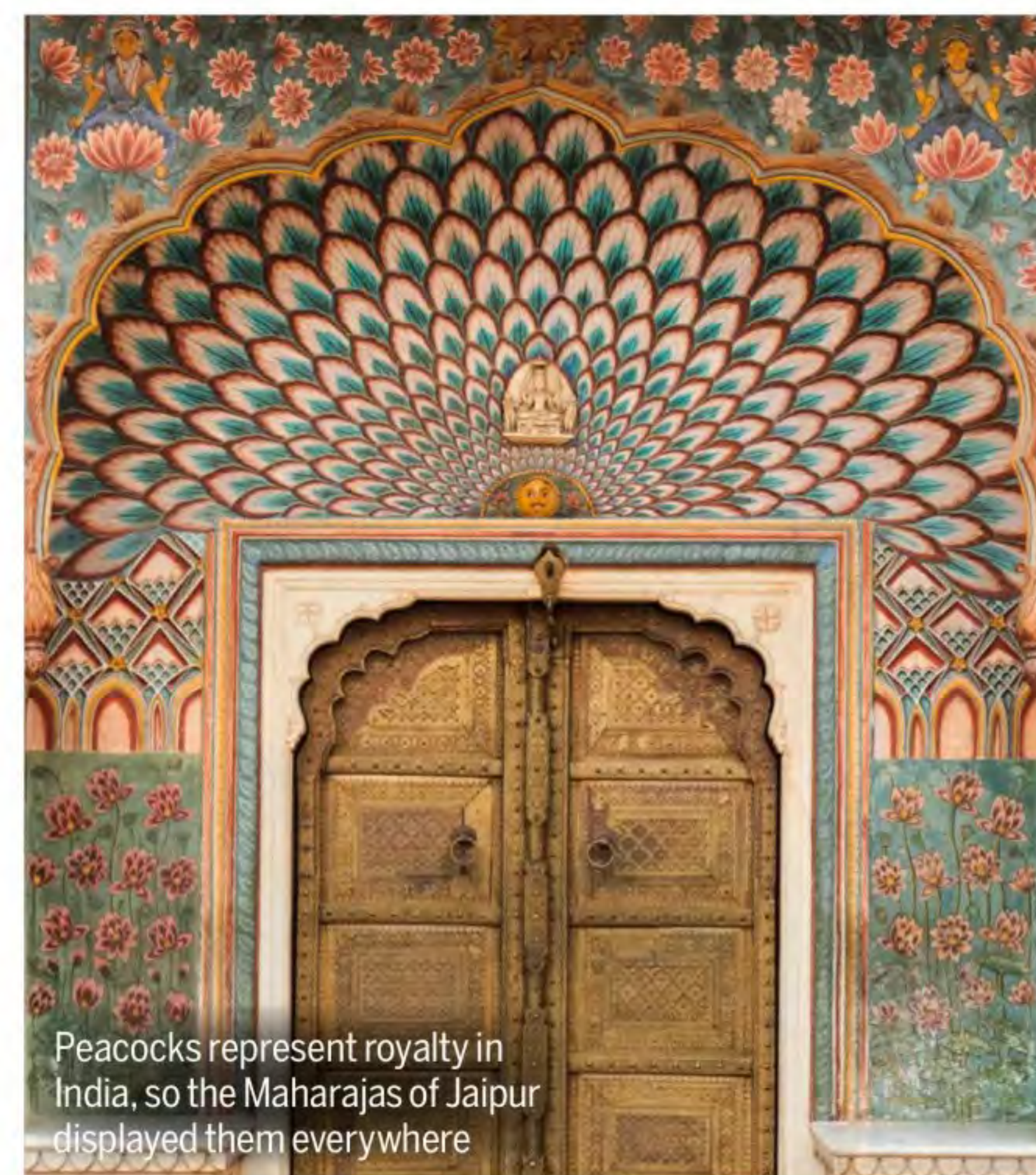
Surrounded by a chorus of car horns, blasting radios and noisy pedestrians, the rickshaw wallah passes under one of the entrances to the Pink City, Jaipur's historic heart. Behind him, with the best seat in the house, are Jaipur's newest visitors – they gaze up in wonderment at a grand terracotta-coloured gate, adorned with stencilled white patterns. This glowing façade is a sign of things to come, for all the city shares the same hue.

Rajasthani culture is big on colours, with bright ornaments and vivid clothing being a staple of markets across the state. Jaipur is its boldest city, because in 1876, the entire old district was painted its trademark pink shade. The Maharaja of Jaipur at the time, Sawai Ram Singh II, was an astute man with a knack for diplomacy – and for enriching his city. Queen Victoria's son, Prince Albert Edward, was in the

middle of a mammoth tour of the subcontinent in 1876. It's said the royal found India rather taxing, and was keen to return home.

Ram Singh suspected Albert needed cheering up. When he heard Albert Edward was on his way to Jaipur, the Maharaja set about painting the entire city pink – a welcoming colour in Indian culture. We can't be sure if the Maharaja's plan worked, but it seemed to have a happy effect on Jaipur's citizenry. The following year, a law was put in place ensuring that no building could be painted in any other colour but pink.

The City Palace was the primary residence of the Maharajas of Jaipur. It's a vast complex, including a number of gorgeous courtyards, palaces, pavilions, temples and gardens. The two diwans (halls of governance) are particularly worth seeing. The Diwan-e-Khas



Peacocks represent royalty in India, so the Maharajas of Jaipur displayed them everywhere

The Hawa Mahal's distinctive frontage is a symbol of the Pink City



The Amber Fort looks over Maota Lake

“THE MAHARAJA HAD THE ENTIRE CITY PAINTED PINK – A WELCOMING COLOUR IN INDIAN CULTURE”

(Hall of Private Audience) fits in perfectly with the rest of the city's colour scheme, with its beautiful pink arches and white floral motifs. Look out for the world's largest silver urn. This belonged to the Maharaja, and it was used on long journeys to carry water – it even took water from the Ganges to England in 1901. The Diwan-e-Aam (Hall of Public Audience), meanwhile, shows mixed Mughal and European influences, with its white walls, colourful ceiling and sparkling chandeliers.

The oldest section of the palace is the Chandra Mahal, which has seven floors in all. You can't explore the interior, but the Pritam Niwas Chowk at the front is more than spectacular. Four doorways lead off the courtyard, representing Hindu deities Vishnu, Devi, Ganesha and the Shiva/Parvati power couple. Vishnu's gate is adorned with gorgeous peacocks, which stretch towards the sky – an entrance fit for a king indeed.

Adjacent to the City Palace is the ornate Hawa Mahal, or 'Palace of Winds'. With its onion domes and 953 latticed stained-glass windows, it's Indian architecture at its finest. It's also Indian history exemplified – the Hawa Mahal was the ladies' annex, as the Maharaja's women had to live in isolation from society once they entered his palace. The design of the windows allowed the women to gaze out onto Jaipur city life, without being observed themselves. It is as beautiful and symbolic today as it ever was – you can watch the chaos unfold on the street below, but nobody can see you doing it.

While the ladies entertained themselves in their beautiful (albeit strictly confined) quarters, the Maharaja had all manner of entertainment at his disposal. One particularly intellectual

ruler, Sawai Singh II, kept himself busy with scientific pursuits. He noticed that his charts of the sky did not match the Islamic astronomical guide. To rectify the mistake, he built the Jantar Mantar astronomical observatory in 1734. 19 ingenious instruments allowed the Maharaja to examine the stars with just the naked eye, and even helped the government to calculate the time – the world's largest sundial is here to help you work that out for yourself, too.

Away from the confines of the City Palace, there's so much more to do in the Pink City. Jaipur is an experience, not just a sightseeing trip. As you traverse the city centre, you'll notice a tall minaret towering above all else. This is the Isarlat Sargasuli, an 18th-century monument commemorating an important battle victory over the neighbouring Maharaja. In the daytime, you can climb up its seven storeys to admire a 360-degree view of the city, but it's perhaps best admired at night when every floor is completely illuminated, highlighting its beauty and marking it out against the skyline.

But it's the hustle and bustle down below that will really enlighten you. Tripolia Bazaar is one of the busiest shopping streets in Jaipur, and you can pick up Rajasthani fabrics, religious trinkets, and jewellery. Step through the archway to a pink shop, and be greeted with all the colours of the rainbow – you won't have seen quite so many bangles in your life. Just remember the first rule of shopping in India – haggle like you mean business.

You'll leave the Pink City as you came in – under one of the city's many old gateways. But Jaipur's unique colour scheme, and the characters that built it, is likely to remain in your heart for a very long time.

AMBER FORT

A short drive into the hills around Jaipur will take you to another World Heritage Site, Amber Fort (one of the six Hill Forts of Rajasthan). This gleaming rose-coloured palace on a steep outcrop was originally built more than a thousand years ago, and the fort's current incarnation is a Mughal-inspired Rajput dream house.

You enter into the palace at the Jaleb Chowk, which was intended as a parading ground for the Maharaja's soldiers. Nowadays, musicians play Rajasthani instruments, and you can watch short performances. Go to the second courtyard, which contains a Diwan-e-Aam, and a richly decorated portico dedicated to Ganesh.

The third courtyard is the most spectacular, with geometric gardens, sparkling fountains, and a small artefact exhibition. The Sheesh Mahal, a mirrored pavilion completed in 1727, is easily one of the most spectacular interiors in all of India – reflective jewels and panels glitter all around.

The last courtyard is the women's section of the palace, where the Maharaja's wives lived. It's the oldest part of the palace, and the most fun to explore – with very few signs and no specific route through here, simply climb up a staircase and see where it leads.

LOCATION Rajasthan, India

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 2019

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (iv), (vi)

TOP TIP Don't forget to tip dancers, musicians, and tour guides – 10 to 20 rupees is a decent amount.

NARA

TEEMING WITH DOCILE DEER AND ARCHITECTURAL WONDERS, JAPAN'S FORMER CAPITAL IS A LIVING MONUMENT TO ANCIENT IMPERIAL LIFE

In around 200 CE, the Japanese shaman queen Himiko was said to have begun a dialogue with China. In the ensuing centuries, this blossomed into a full-blown cultural exchange with China and Korea. As Japan's Yamato Kingdom began to formalise a Chinese model of governance, the city of Nara – set alongside some of the country's oldest settlements – was a chief beneficiary of its latest cultural innovations.

Among the most fascinating imports was the introduction of a new religion, Buddhism, which began to flourish alongside the country's indigenous Shinto faith. Embracing the new creed, the ailing Emperor Yomei decided to build a great Buddhist temple to pray for his recovery, but died soon after. His sister and son, Prince Shotoku – described as the founder of Buddhism in Japan – later completed the magnificent 7th-century Horyu-ji temple on his behalf, which was said to have been rebuilt after a great fire in 670.

Today, an iconic five-story pagoda towers over a 46-acre (17-hectare) plot, looming above the Main Hall, eastern precinct and Hall of Visions. This complex became Japan's first ever World Heritage Site – Buddhist Monuments in the Horyu-ji Area – in 1993. It houses thousands of cultural treasures, including almost 200 national treasures or important cultural properties.

When the Yamato emperor decided to pick a permanent capital to rule from in 710, Nara was the most logical choice. In 728, Emperor Shomu commissioned a temple on behalf of his deceased infant son. In the ensuing decades, as the realm was consumed by smallpox, crop failure and an attempted coup, the emperor ordered the widespread

construction of monasteries, to which his son's temple would be central – eventually blossoming into Tōdai-ji temple. Designed to house the colossal 15-metre (49-foot) tall Daibutsu, or Great Buddha (made from over 400 tons of bronze), the Great Buddha Hall remained the world's largest wooden structure until 1998. That same year, Todai-ji was inducted as a World Heritage Site alongside dozens of other historical buildings and sites in the city, as part of the Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara.

Despite the influx of Buddhism, Nara continued to host the red Kasugataisha Shinto shrine. Until the Edo Period, it was rebuilt every 20 years – to ensure the wood remained free from the impurity of death. The shrine is nestled within the beautiful Nara Park, where deer bow their heads before taking treats from visitors. Though the country's capital would later move to Kyoto, and then Tokyo, the city remains scattered with monuments to its historic role, as the country's one-time spiritual and political heart.

Many of Nara's historic buildings have also been designated National Treasures and Important Cultural Properties by the Japanese government



LOCATION Nara, Japan

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1998*

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (iii), (iv), (vi)*

TOP TIP When visiting temples, take off your shoes, don't push in and try to keep your voice down.

* Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara



Russia's Lake Baikal covers an area larger than Belgium



LAKE BAIKAL

THIS VAST SIBERIAN LAKE IS LARGER THAN MANY OF THE WORLD'S COUNTRIES

Dubbed the 'Galápagos of Russia', Lake Baikal is considered to be one of the natural wonders of the world. Situated in a cleft in southern Siberia, the rift lake is home to some 2,500 species of animals – 80 per cent of which are endemic. It also holds as much as 23 per cent of the world's unfrozen freshwater as well as 1,000 species of plants.

The lake, which is fed by 330 inflowing rivers, is believed to have formed as many as 30 million years ago and the stats concerning its sheer size are certainly impressive. At over 635 kilometres (395 miles) long and just under 80 kilometres (50 miles) wide, it has a surface area of just over 31,720 square kilometres (12,245 square miles). Baikal is also the deepest lake in the world, plunging to a maximum depth of 1,642 metres (5,387 feet).

Since active tectonic plates are attempting to tear Siberia apart, the lake is actually getting deeper every year. The clarity of its water allows for great visibility, down to as much as 40 metres (130 feet). This means it's possible to see the abundance of fish and mollusc which inhabit the lake. A visit to the bottom can take as much as five hours – as demonstrated when Russian scientists ventured down to the rocky

bed in 2008. It's not a journey that tourists are able to embark upon, however.

Thankfully, there is also much going on at the surface. The lake is dotted with 27 islands, the largest of which is forest-covered Olkhon – a piece of land so big that it even has its own lakes. It is populated by around 1,500 people, mostly the aboriginal Buryats who live in five villages. They also reside to the east of the lake where they raise camels, cattle, horses, sheep and goats. Their cuisine is mouth-watering.

The area is also blessed with soaring mountain ranges and a surrounding ring of coniferous forests where bears, birds, lynx, elk, fox and deer rub shoulders. Back towards the water, there is the Baikal seal – the only pinniped species to live completely in freshwater – and the Baikal sturgeon which swim at depths of up to 150 metres (490 feet).

But then, the flourishing fauna and flora is exactly why UNESCO awarded the lake the status of a World Heritage Site, marking it as "exceptional value to evolutionary science". Go in winter to see the ice on the lake and go dog-sledding or drive across the surface. Or visit in the summer if you fancy a cool dip. In either case, you'll bring back amazing memories.

Keep an eye out for Baikal seals, which are endemic to the area



LOCATION | Siberia, Russia

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION | 1996

TYPE OF SITE | Natural

CRITERIA | (vii), (viii), (ix), (x)

TOP TIP | There are problems with pollution so avoid drinking local water.


 A large, multi-tiered white castle with dark grey tiled roofs, situated on a hill surrounded by green trees under a clear blue sky.

The deceptively beautiful Himeji Castle is a masterpiece of defensive design

HIMEJI CASTLE

GLISTENING IN PEARLY WHITE RADIANCE, THIS JAPANESE FORTRESS HAS WITHSTOOD THE TEST OF TIME BETTER THAN ANY OTHER

A magnificent blend of pristine architecture and imposing design, the stronghold known as Himeji Castle – or locally as Shirasagi-jo, 'White Heron Castle' – was first built in the 15th century, before being massively expanded by the warlord Ikeda Terumasa, in 1609.

Sat atop a 32-metre (105-foot) hill in the Harima Plain, a strategic point on the way to the old capital of Kyoto, the castle spans 1.07 square kilometres (0.41 square miles), centred around the Tenshu-gun – a complex including the donjon, keeps and their connecting structures. Three main towers rise atop one another, straddled by numerous layers of projecting roofs, doubling as lookout points. Forming a complex network of labyrinthine passageways, the castle was a masterpiece of strategic defence – one of the few Japanese castle keeps to feature wing buildings.

Defenders could not only fire arrows from small holes, but drop large stones, or pour vats of hot oil from windows onto the attackers below, while a kitchen made sure the garrison remained fed in the event of a siege. The samurai also planted gum trees, to ensure they had emergency supplies of Vitamin C. Outside, a two-metre (seven-foot) moat would engulf

and drown any who slipped in, while paths into the castle led to bottlenecks, where defenders could more easily dispatch their enemies. Gates closest to the Tenshu-gun were deceptively simple, blending into the walls, providing the garrison another element of surprise.

The complex's east path featured a deliberate incline, making it harder for attackers to assault, while a tower and plastered earthen wall at the top allowed the defenders to counterattack from a vantage point.

The lord's bedchamber was furthermore said to have been designed with squeaky floorboards, so no assassin could ever catch him unawares. With a wooden structure coated in white plastered earthen walls, the original castle has remarkably survived, where so few Japanese castles have. Despite a fire in 1882, which destroyed the surrounding residential compounds, Himeji itself remained intact. Even as Allied fire bombing in World War II burned down most of the city, the castle stood strong.

Today, guests are free to explore the castle's innards, working their way up its six ever-smaller floors. In keeping with the strikingly beautiful design, the third bailey, or Sannomaru, features a glorious cherry tree-lined lawn, perfect for viewing the cherry blossoms.



The surrounding grounds are perfect for cherry blossom viewing

LOCATION Himeji, Japan

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1993

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (iv)

TOP TIP To avoid the busiest crowds, don't visit during Golden Week, towards the end of April.

MELAKA & GEORGE TOWN

TWO SITES THAT ILLUSTRATE THE EXCHANGE BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

This listing combines the historic cores of two fascinating Malaysian city centres, Melaka and George Town. Today, they remain perfect examples of colonial dwellings from their past as trading ports that linked the East and West. Although one heritage site, both locations are actually around 510 kilometres (317 miles) apart.

George Town is the colourful capital of the Malaysian island of Penang. Visit the old town and you'll find British colonial buildings alongside Chinese shops and mosques. It was the first British settlement in Southeast Asia and in the 19th century, became one of the most important British ports within the region. Melaka city is the capital of the coastal state of Melaka, in the southwest of the country. In 1641, it passed into Dutch hands for 150 years, followed by a short period of British control.

Because both cities have had a unique succession of cultural influences – those from the Malay Archipelago, plus India and China and the rest of Europe – they play home to a varied mixture of architecture, plus townscapes that are like no other in East or South Asia. Melaka and George Town were originally trading ports, but the reason they've earned their listing as a heritage site is because their city centres contain the best surviving remnants of this past function.

George Town, named after King George III, has one of the largest collections of pre-war buildings in Southeast Asia. Although the World Heritage Site itself only covers around 2.6 square kilometres (one square mile) of the city centre, in this protected zone there are plenty of landmarks to visit, such as the Penang State Museum and Fort Cornwallis. You can reach

this fort by walking from the city centre to the waterfront – worth doing if you're interested in finding out how generations of explorers, colonisers and locals all shaped Penang. You'll also find many religious houses, including St George's Church, the oldest Anglican church in Southeast Asia.

In the state of Melaka, you'll find cultural sites reflecting parts of its history. Standout visiting spots include Christ Church, the oldest Protestant church in Malaysia, as well as the Maritime Museum & Naval Museum. You also can't miss the Dutch Square in the heart of Melaka's old town, which is built in red stone and surrounded by shopping opportunities.

These sites both embrace and preserve their historical past as trading ports, and although at times the cultural experience is mixed, it's certainly fascinating.

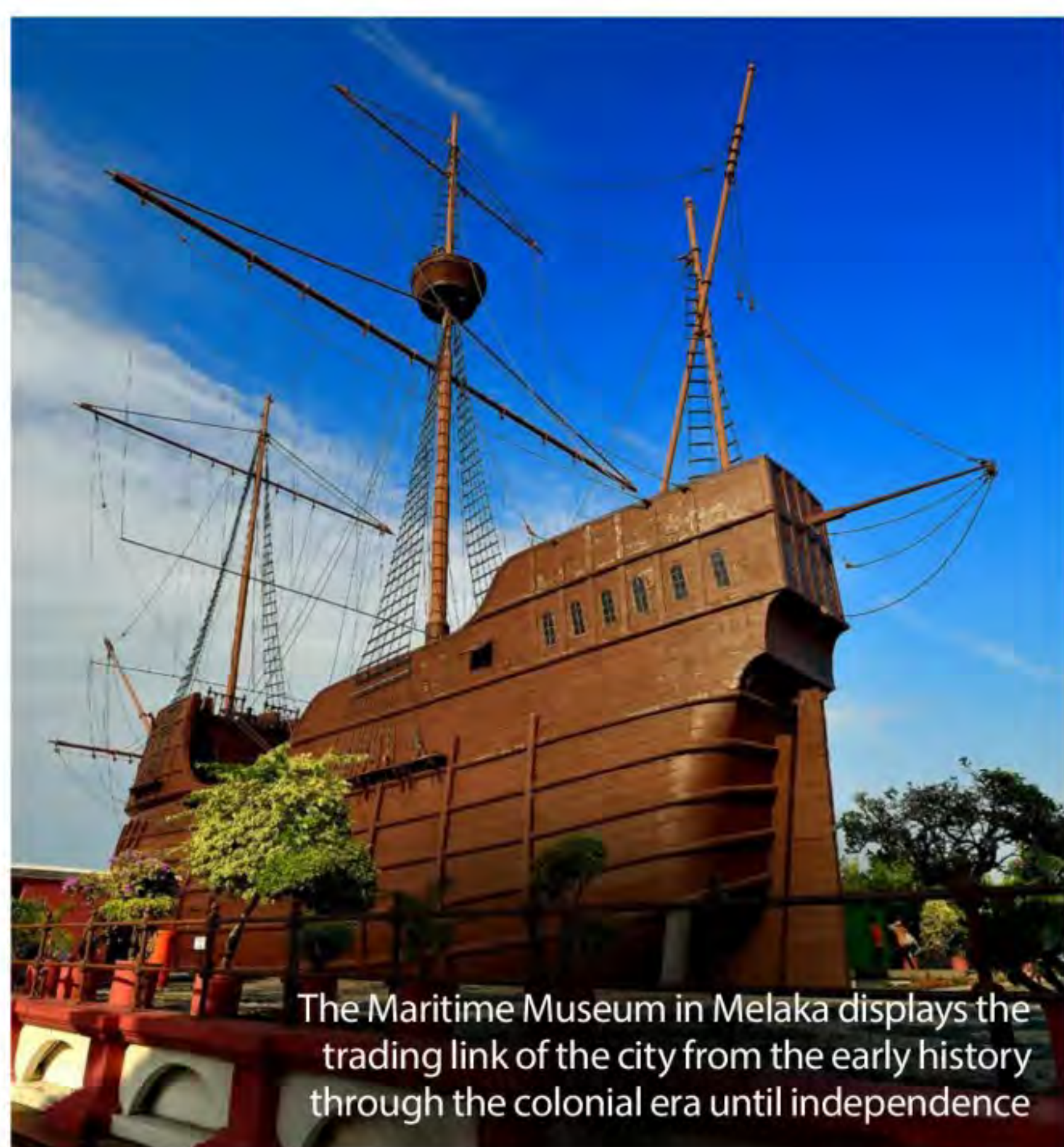
LOCATION Malaysia

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 2008

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (iii), (iv)

TOP TIP Build up an appetite before you visit Melaka's night market of street food stalls.



The Maritime Museum in Melaka displays the trading link of the city from the early history through the colonial era until independence



Christ Church is an iconic 18th-century Anglican church in the city of Melaka

GREAT HIMALAYAN NATIONAL PARK

TOWERING HIGH OVER THE EARTH, THE HIMALAYAN VALLEYS ARE A PARAGON OF THE MIGHT AND MAJESTY OF MOTHER NATURE

While ancient scriptures speculated that even “one hundred ages of the gods” would be insufficient to do justice to the Himalayas, nowhere is this truer than the Great Himalayan National Park. Boasting some of the greatest biodiversity on the planet, the gargantuan park sprawls over 1,170 square kilometres (450 square miles) across India’s Himachal Pradesh region. Here, meltwater feeds down to a series of westerly and north-westerly flowing rivers, funnelling into the Indus, via the River Beas. It’s the Himalayan engine room, feeding a region home to a tenth of the world’s plants, and half of India’s endemic flora.

The park unfolds in an otherworldly mosaic of intricate ecosystems – each a microcosm of the world at large. Temperate conifer and broadleaf forests are torn open by the roaring Parvati and Tirthan rivers. Flattered by a sprinkling of crystalline dew, verdant alpine meadows burst into a rainbow of colourful blooms each spring, before shrubbery is reduced to grasses, herbs and low-lying shrubs, such as the delicate juniper bush. Meanwhile, the park’s upper reaches explode in a tangle of herculean glaciers and ice, capped by a glorious crown of spectacular peaks, climbing 6,000 metres (19,685 feet) heavenward.

LOCATION Himachal Pradesh, India

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 2014

TYPE OF SITE Natural

CRITERIA (x)

TOP TIP Many routes are only suitable for hikers accustomed to difficult treks at high altitude.



The park is marked by a spectacular array of river-carved valleys



Nestled alongside the Parvati River, Sri Guru Nanak Ji Gurdwara is a Sikh and Hindu pilgrimage site

“THOSE ACCUSTOMED TO HIMALAYAN MOUNTAINEERING ARE IN FOR A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME QUEST”

These impregnable peaks are home to the elusive snow leopard, endangered and notoriously hard to spot. They are just one of 31 remarkable mammals protected by its rugged climes, such as the resilient Himalayan musk deer, blue sheep, Himalayan tahr and the haughty Himalayan black bear. Overhead, more than 200 bird species jostle for position, as the shy golden eagle and evasive Himalayan griffon dart downwards, frightening white-capped and plumbeous water redstarts from the riverbeds. Elsewhere, the bashful orange-feathered Western tragopan pheasant scours for a mate.

The dramatic Tirthan Valley is named after the sacred water spring, the River Tirth, which trickles down from the 4,800-metre (15,748-foot) Hanskund Peak, before seeming to split the world apart at its namesake valley. At an altitude of around 1,600 metres (5,250 feet) above sea level, surrounded by idyllic hamlets, the gorge is an adventurer's dream; an untouched wonderland of river-forged terraces and craggy cliffs, scattered with tumbling waterfalls and mysterious pine forests. At the bottom, acclimatised anglers try their luck in the Tirthan River, hauling out delectable brown and rainbow trouts, perfect for campfire cook-outs beneath the stars.

Meanwhile, the V-shaped Sainj Valley erupts from the lower depths of the main Himalaya, east of Kullu. The River Sainj widens as it winds around the southwest, embracing the River Beas at the small village of Larji, where colourful prayer flags flap in the wind, wafting the scent of freshly brewed salty butter tea into the air. The valley is sprinkled with tower temples, including the curious five-storey, pagoda-style Manu Temple.

The Jiwa Nal Valley is no less dramatic. Its namesake river is sparked by the small glacial pond Sartoo, tumbling westward through the village of Siund. Experienced explorers can trek 35 kilometres (22 miles) from here to the Parvati Valley, but as one of the most isolated

parts of the entire park, without even locals to rescue stragglers, permission must be obtained from the park before beginning this eight-day odyssey. Those accustomed to the dangers of Himalayan mountaineering are in for a once-in-a-lifetime quest, following cairns across untouched meadows, spat out from unforgiving gorges, and an emerald green pond framed by snow-capped peaks.

Rising eastwards, the neighbouring Parvati Valley rises to 5,000 metres (16,404 feet) above sea level, from the confluence of the Parvati and Beas rivers, at Kullu District's Bhuntar. Hardy hikers ramble from here to Kasol, a launchpad for adventures into the great beyond, whether birdwatching and meditating, or village hopping, with one of the local dogs for company. Tucked within this envelope of paradise, the villagers of Rasol cook up a storm, using local organic produce. Mushroom hunters scour the peaks for the finest Guccini mushrooms, a crucial ingredient in the local fried rice, paired perfectly with the freshest mint tea around.

This is earth at its wildest, so hikes are best enjoyed with a guide – the landscape is treacherous, the forests labyrinthine and bears always in search of their next meal. Carving a gorge from the mountains, the valley is dressed in curtains of waterfalls, cascading gently down sheer rock walls. Rising ever higher towards the Basuki Nal tributary, the coniferous forest and silver-birch groves are swallowed by the hungry earth, as alpine meadows fight with boulders for attention.

Though rugged and ever-changing, the Great Himalayan National Park moves at a cosmic pace; spending your time exploring its countless nooks and crannies is like placing an ear to the ground of the heavens themselves. Filled with serene sanctuaries, teeming with life in all its forms, this region is a smouldering alchemical cauldron, filled with the ingredients of life itself.



One of 31 species of mammal to call the park home, snow leopards are hard to spot

SAGARMATHA NATIONAL PARK, NEPAL

The wonders of the Himalayas can also be discovered in Nepal's Sagarmatha National Park – a fellow World Heritage Site. Marked by its dramatic glaciated peaks, labyrinthine gorges and sweeping rhododendron forests, this park stretches over 1,240km² (480mi²) and is home to more than 20 villages and 6,000 sherpas – who have lived in the region for centuries. The gatekeepers to infinity, they stand guard over 14 mountains, including the world's largest, Everest, known as Sagarmatha in Nepali, in all her 8,849m (29,032ft) splendour.

Aside from housing four of the world's 14 mountains that are more than 8,000m (26,245ft) tall, the park is dressed in blue pine, silver fir and birch, casting shadows over alpine flowers, ponds and lakes. High atop the canopy, red pandas listen to the crackling of glaciers, while below snow leopards and Himalayan black bears scour for food.

The park's skyline is dominated by the gargantuan Mount Everest, known locally as 'Sagarmatha'



POTALA PALACE

THE BEATING HEART OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM, POTALA PALACE IS A SPIRITUAL SANCTUM IN THE CLOUDS

Known as the Palace in the Clouds, Tibet's magnificent Potala floats elegantly 3,700 metres (12,140 feet) above sea level. The highest palace in the world, this fortress-like monastery rises from the centre of Lhasa Valley atop Marpo Ri, or Red Hill.

Originally home to a 7th-century palace, built as a symbol of love by the Tibetan king, Songtsen Gampo, for his new princess, the site was converted into the 5th Dalai Lama's winter residence in 1645. More than 50 years of expansions and renovations saw the palace transformed into a sprawling 13-storey complex. For over 300 years, ten generations of the Dalai Lama lived and worshipped here, until 1959, when the 14th was exiled and fled to India. Potala's name pays homage to a sacred mountain of legend, Mount Potalaka, where Avalokiteśvara (the patron deity of Tibet, who embodies compassion) is believed to reside.

Today, the palace nestles surprisingly organically into the hillside, and 1,000 richly decorated rooms and chapels within are linked by butter-lamp-lined corridors. Potala Palace stands not only as an architectural marvel, but an enduring symbol of Tibetan culture, and a

testament to its people's unshakable beliefs. Each year, Buddhist pilgrims travel thousands of miles, often by foot, to circle the perimeter of the palace, spinning prayer wheels and chanting blessings as they go.

Beyond the perimeter, hidden behind turreted, rammed earth walls lie two, seemingly intertwined palaces, one red and the other white – the latter is repainted with a concoction of milk, honey, and sugar each autumn. A masterpiece of Tibetan design, the White Palace houses the main ceremonial hall, where the empty throne of the Dalai Lama still sits. On the upper floors, the Dalai Lama's private rooms and audience hall remain untouched, offering a rare glimpse into palace life. The palace is adorned with 698 murals and contains 10,000 hand-painted scrolls, gilded sculptures, carpets, porcelain and a prodigious collection of ancient sutras.

From the centre of the complex, the Red Palace emerges, elegantly crowned by seven golden roofs, crafted from gilded bronze. Each one is embellished with flower-and-bell-shaped spires that stretch heavenward. Protected within the Red Palace are the magnificently

LOCATION Lhasa, Tibet

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1994

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (iv), (vi)

TOP TIP Take a day or two to acclimatise in Lhasa before visiting the palace to avoid your visit being marred by altitude sickness.

bejewelled burial stupas of eight Dalai Lamas. The glittering tomb of the 7th Dalai Lama was constructed in 1757 and contains half a ton of gold. Meanwhile, the towering tomb of the 8th Dalai Lama is encrusted with thousands of precious stones that glisten in the candlelight.

Before descending, the palace's whitewashed terrace offers up sweeping views of Lhasa Valley and further, to the snow-dusted mountains; the perfect place for a moment of quiet reflection on the rooftop of the world.

The white facade of the palace is repainted every autumn



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©Getty Images

The dramatic landscape of Komodo National Park is an area of exceptional natural beauty

KOMODO NATIONAL PARK

VISITING INDONESIA'S MOST PROTECTED ISLANDS IS LIKE EXPLORING A LOST WORLD, COMPLETE WITH DRAGONS

It's hard to mistake Komodo National Park for any other. Its distinctive volcanic landscape is made up of curvy, sandy, tree-lined beaches and rocky mountain ridges. Covering almost 2,200 square kilometres (850 square miles), the park is made up of 29 islands within the central region of the Indonesian archipelago.

The national park was established in 1980, primarily to protect the Komodo dragon – the world's largest lizard. Around 5,700 of these remarkable prehistoric-looking reptiles reside here, along with 72 species of birds and a small range of terrestrial mammals, including buffalo, deer, wild boar, monkeys and rats. The islands' surrounding waters host an astonishing diversity of marine life, with over 1,000 species of fish, 260 coral species, sharks, manta rays, whales, dugongs, sea turtles and dolphins.

The region's famous dragons, marine biodiversity and unique landscape led to the Komodo National Park being declared a World Heritage Site in 1991, boosting conservation efforts. The protected area has a large marine

'buffer zone' which helps to deter would-be poachers targeting the Komodo dragons, as well as illegal fishing – two of the greatest threats facing the park.

Ecotourism is an important source of revenue for the park. Several islands run treks up to viewpoints (Padar viewpoint is jaw-dropping), with panoramic views across the entire park. Hike up Lawa Darat Gili for stunning views of the islands and then take to the shores to swim with manta rays at Manta Point. If photography is more your thing, then try your hand at capturing some images of the iconic Komodo dragons on Rinca Island. Tour providers can take you on excursions to witness these incredible lizards; seeing them in the flesh can feel like you've travelled to another world entirely.

If you've never been snorkeling or diving before then this is the perfect place to start. The islands of Komodo, Rinca and Padar provide opportunities to go snorkelling or scuba diving in the crystal-clear waters to see some

LOCATION Indonesia

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1991

TYPE OF SITE Natural

CRITERIA (vii), (x)

TOP TIP Take your snorkel to make the most of your trip by exploring the beaches and their waters.

of these reef residents in their natural habitat. What's more, the Southeast Asian climate means the waters remain pleasantly warm for most of the year.

One final highlight during a trip to this unique heritage site is Pink Beach on Komodo Island, a picture-postcard setting featuring clear blue waters, otherworldly pink sand and pristine coral reefs.



Having failed to obtain immortality, Qin Shi Huang instead surrounded his tomb with thousands of life-sized soldiers

©Getty Images

THE MAUSOLEUM OF THE FIRST QIN EMPEROR

CHINA'S MAUSOLEUM OF THE FIRST QIN EMPEROR IS THE SPECTACULAR LEGACY OF A MAN WHO TRIED TO CONQUER DEATH ITSELF

In just one decade, the king of Qin conquered the other six kingdoms of China, bringing the Warring States period to an end in 221 BCE. He overturned the old order and rebuilt a new China, unified beneath a single government. In celebration, he adopted the title Shi Huangdi, meaning 'First Emperor', and built a cult of personality around himself.

He stamped out corruption, devised a new uniform writing script, standardised weights and measures and enforced strict punishments for those who dared to step out of line. This gratuitous punitive code gave the emperor access to huge amounts of slave labour, who he put to work on epic projects, such as the Great Wall of China. Obsessed with death, he devoted much of his life to the pursuit of immortality, but as a safeguard for his soul, put 1.5 million slaves to work on a grand tomb.

The emperor's mausoleum was located at the northern foot of Lishan Mountain, 35 kilometres (22 miles) from Xi'an, in Shaanxi. It was placed within a rectangular, double-walled enclosure, aligned from north to south.

There, endless streams of workers toiled over a 56-square-kilometre (22-square-mile) plot, digging hundreds of pits, and filling them with meticulously hand-crafted figures. While the ceiling was supposedly studded with precious stones, depicting the constellations of heaven, the floor represented the empire, and was said to feature rivers of mercury. Interspersed between were 8,000 life-size terracotta figures, most famously depicting soldiers, horses, bronze chariots and weapons – alongside strongmen, water birds, musicians and acrobats. The terracotta warriors tellingly face east, ready to defend the emperor from attack.

The scope and intricacy of the mausoleum are a testament not just to the might of the first Qin emperor, but to the Qin's sophisticated levels of architecture, urban planning, metallurgy, pottery and various other skills. When the emperor died in 210 BCE, many of those who toiled on his tomb were sealed within alongside him, so none could reveal its secrets. It was lined with bronze and disguised to look like just another hill.

LOCATION Lintong County, Shaanxi Province, China

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1987

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (iii), (iv), (vi)

TOP TIP Do not buy signed books from people claiming to be the farmer who discovered the tomb.

Although the Qin dynasty would only last a few more years, Qin Shi Huang laid the foundation for 2,000 years of imperial rule. His magnificent warriors would remarkably remain undiscovered until a Chinese farmer stumbled across some terracotta fragments in 1974, and subsequent excavations revealed the magnificent necropolis.

HOI AN

HOI AN IS THE EPITOME OF A SOUTHEAST ASIAN PORT CITY, BRIMMING WITH CULTURE AND COLOUR

As you weave through the streets of Hoi An and through its markets, you might think you were on the set of a big Hollywood production. Splashed with a prominent yellow hue, the 1,000-plus timber-frame buildings give Vietnam's historic heritage site an unmistakable characteristic. The city's religious buildings adorned with intricate tiling and murals, and landmarks like the famous Japanese Covered Bridge pagoda, make Hoi An a place of religious importance. Although tourism has lifted the heritage site into the mainstream market, the atmosphere of this great city is as exciting as ever.

The city is situated just a few miles away from Vietnam's eastern coastline and near the mouth of the river Thu Bon. Renting a motorbike, or scooter, is one of the best ways to get around (cycling is also an option for a more leisurely ride). The Ancient Town is the commercial hub of this port city and walking from building to building, crossing the river and through markets, you soon get

a sense of its various cultural and historical backgrounds. From French colonial buildings to Chinese shophouses and temples, to Japanese structures including the Japanese Covered Bridge, the city's rich heritage as a once vibrant trading port, active between the 15th and 19th centuries, is still evident today.

On your trip to Hoi An, pay a visit to the Old House of Tan Ky, a preserved 18th-century merchant's house decorated with Japanese elements on the ceiling and elegant Chinese characters and poems hanging from the columns. Afterwards, take a stroll around Phuc Kien Assembly Hall, founded in the late 1600s and home to the Jinshang Golden Mountain temple, dedicated to the goddess Thien Hau; all of which should feature on your Hoi An itinerary.

The Vietnamese Lunar New Year of Tet is celebrated in style in Hoi An, with colourful market stalls and food sellers dishing up national favourites such as Banh Chung (a traditional rice cake made with beans and pork, wrapped in a leaf). Market stalls and shops sell

LOCATION Vietnam

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1999

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (v)

TOP TIP Hoi An is the place to go for tailored suits and dresses.

a wide range of locally grown produce, and there are haberdasheries and clothes shops round every turn – Hoi An is also said to be the tailoring capital of Vietnam.

Looking for the perfect place to kick back after a long day of sightseeing and shopping? Why not head to An Bang Beach, a stretch of coastline just a short drive away from the central district of Hoi An, to watch the sunset over the South China Sea.



The name Hoi An translates as 'peaceful meeting place'



RANTHAMBORE FORT

JUST ONE OF MANY RAJASTHANI HILL FORTS, RANTHAMBORE OFFERS ATMOSPHERIC TEMPLES, LUMINESCENT LAKES, AND EVEN BIG CATS

Most fortresses rely on advanced defences, high walls and armed guards to keep people out. The Rajasthani fort of Ranthambore relies on pesky monkeys nowadays, but at one time, it was the most imposing castle around.

The hilltop fortress was likely built in the 10th century. Its walls stretch eight kilometres (five miles), and its vantage point means it can survey a vast area of jungle, plains, and lakes. It was of great strategic importance, as it stood on the trade route between North and Central India. Through the ages, it was fought over by rulers from across the land. You can see a mix of architectural influences in the fortress today, and also explore the remains of royal living quarters – the Rani Haveli (Queen's Palace) and the entertainment palace are of particular interest. Stand on this side of the walls and stare at the Padam Talao lake – if you're lucky, you might spot a tiger taking a dip.

It wasn't just the land the fort defended – it's a site of great religious significance, too. It initially gained importance as a holy place for

Jains, but its various occupants installed Hindu and Muslim religious buildings within the walls. There are two particularly notable constructs – the first one the visitor encounters is the old mosque, which sits on a stunning lake covered with radiant red algae. There's also a pastel blue dargah (Sufi shrine) close by.

Your route through the fortress will soon take you to the 32 pillars chhatri, a gorgeous elevated pavilion that looks out over the fort buildings and flower-filled gardens. In its base, there's a minuscule Hindu temple hidden in the darkness – just be sure to take your shoes off and cover yourself before you enter the candlelit shrine.

The next site is the royal bathing ghat, a lake the ruler (and some of his courtiers) used to wash in. Local legend has it that a beautiful Hindu queen, Padmavati, drowned herself in this lake to save her honour after her husband was killed by an approaching Muslim sultan – but whether that's true or not is heavily contested.

The final stop on any Ranthambore Fort itinerary will be the lively Trinetra Ganesh

LOCATION Sawai Madhopur, India

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 2013

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii), (iii)

TOP TIP The only way to access the fort is by guided tour, but there are plenty of knowledgeable guides in the area.

temple, built in 1300 CE. At sunrise and sunset, Hindus pray in front of a three-eyed Ganesh idol, and you can go inside to experience this for yourself. What's going on outside is just as interesting – you can haggle with a market seller for a symbolic trinket, dodge cows that stroll past, or simply sit down with a small cup of chai. You'll need it after your long walk around the fort!

The 32 pillars chhatri is a popular photo spot



Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park
is home to a fantastic array of
marine wildlife



TUBBATAHA

ASIA'S GREATEST CORAL REEF IS A NATURAL PARK, WORLD HERITAGE SITE AND AN INCOMPARABLE MARINE SANCTUARY

Spread over almost 100,000 hectares in the Sulu Sea, the sunken rust-coloured atolls of Tubbataha attract divers from around the world who wish to commune with the reef's spectacular aquatic life. One of the Philippines' oldest ecosystems, it's home to more than 350 species of coral and nearly 500 species of fish, and is also a haven for sharks of every size. Tubbataha's two main features are the North and South reefs, and the highlight of any dive is to cross paths with either a stealthy manta ray or a vibrant whale shark.

Tubbataha's North Islet is a renowned nesting site for birds and marine turtles. Visitors must take care not to disturb the inhabitants or leave any waste. A recurring favourite among Tubbataha's several dive sites is the 'Washing Machine', where a gash in the coral feeds an irresistible current, helping along a pageant of aquatic life. Thanks to the efforts of the Philippine government to protect Tubbataha for the past 30 years, it's

forbidden to poke about the reef for souvenirs, or disturb the fragile ecosystem in any way. So, you'll need to be sure you visit the reef with a responsible tour company.

Reaching Tubbataha follows a set route from Puerto Princesa City. Puerto Princesa is accessible with any local airline, and the city is the place to book onto a thrilling liveaboard tour. Typical itineraries cover the Visayas region, where so many other breathtaking locations are found, along with Tubbataha dive packages. Liveaboard arrangements are far from spartan and offer private cabins, sumptuous meals and professional crews who'll go to great lengths to make their guests' trip as comfortable as possible. It's also possible to book night dives with specific diving operators, usually spanning a few visits over a week.

Exploring Tubbataha's entirety can be a challenge since a single day will not suffice for serious divers, given the size of the area. There are established sites, however,

including locations where divers are allowed to spy sharks while they are at rest, or prowling round immense gatherings of fish. Other species worth watching out for are the chilled-out turtles, who have grown accustomed to human visitors, and the resident jellyfish.

LOCATION | Philippines

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION | 1993

TYPE OF SITE | Natural

CRITERIA | (vii), (ix), (x)

TOP TIP | The only way to reach Tubbataha is by joining a liveaboard diving tour. There are dozens to choose from.



HA LONG BAY



VISIT VIETNAM'S SPLENDID HA LONG BAY AND EXPLORE CAVES AND BEACHES

Along the northeastern coastline of Vietnam, and 175 kilometres (109 miles) from the city of Hanoi, is Ha Long Bay; an area of more than 1,600 islands and islets covered by rainforests and lined with golden beaches. UNESCO appointed the seascape a World Heritage Site in 1994 in recognition of its outstanding beauty and great biological interest. The giant limestone rocks are a hot spot for cave exploration, swimming, snorkelling and trekking.

Staying on a boat is the best way to experience everything that Ha Long Bay has to offer, and whether you choose a junk boat, or the more comfortable all-inclusive cruiser option, it's worth staying for at least one night on the water to make the most of your trip to Ha Long Bay and the surrounding attractions.

Organised group tours run out of Hanoi, taking you on a round trip to Ha Long Bay with full-day excursions starting at a reasonable £25 (\$32). This often includes transfer from Hanoi, and lunch is also provided. Once in Ha Long Bay, expect a four to five-hour boat trip that will take you on a guided tour of some

of the most exciting parts of the Bay. Visit floating villages to see how the locals live in homes built on water and explore hidden caves around the likes of the Thien Cung Cave and the Sung Sot (Surprise) Cave, taking you through underground passages and corridors to see what these giant limestone rocks are hiding. And, when you're not cruising along on a boat, kayaking is the best way to get around the Bay. If you opt for a tour, then kayaks are usually included as part of the excursion. The limestone pillars are a truly incredible sight from the water, with most of the islands also uninhabited and unimpacted by humans.

The island of Tuan Chau is host to beautiful sandy beaches lined with palm trees, as well as resort complexes and tourist attractions that draw in crowds all year round. Accessible via the two-kilometre (1.2-mile) road from the mainland, Tuan Chau is the perfect place to stop off for a few nights in a comfortable two or three-star hotel and to explore Ha Long Bay – or to just kick back, relax and take it all in.

Trekking should also be a part of your itinerary while visiting Ha Long Bay. Make it to

the top of Poem Mountain for rewarding views over the surrounding area, and visit Cat Ba Island for a quieter, less crowded escape. This is where you can rent a scooter and ride up and down the incredible island to witness spectacular mountains and breathtaking coastal roads. Staying on Cat Ba Island for a night or two is recommended before heading back to the bustling urban sprawl of Hanoi.

LOCATION Vietnam

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1994

TYPE OF SITE Natural

CRITERIA (vii), (viii)

TOP TIP Don't book a tour until you arrive. Shop around with tour operators, so you can tailor your experience.



Cave 16, where the Kailasa temple is located, is Ellora's most famous sight

ELLORA CAVES

CULTURE CARVED OUT OF A MOUNTAIN SIDE

India's Ellora complex is an ancient site composed of over 100 monasteries and temples that stretch for over two kilometres (1.25 miles). What makes the site so mind-blowing is that its huge buildings were not built. Rather, they were carved by hand out of the side of a basalt cliff. To stand at the foot of some of these towering religious buildings is to marvel at the work and dedication involved in shaping these huge structures. To see the intricate carvings that adorn its temples, the many beautiful sculptures and statues that sit on and around them, is to find yourself in awe of the artistry of the ancient hands that crafted these places over hundreds of years, from 600-1000 CE.

Thirty four of Ellora's caves are open for the public to explore, all of them showcasing a range of architectural styles and religious iconography related to the respective faiths that crafted them. These include caves carved out by Buddhists, Hindus and Jains that, sat side by side, paint a compelling picture of the religious tolerance and diversity practised in ancient India.

The site is home to the largest monolithic rock excavation in the world, located in Cave 16. The Kailasa or Kailasanatha temple pays tribute to the Hindu god Shiva. It is surrounded by a series of shrines, an assembly hall and a gateway. The highest point of the temple reaches 32.6 metres (107 foot) above the court below.

Another notable construction is the Buddhist Vishvakarma Cave, located in Cave 10. The large worship hall, built around 650 CE, is reminiscent of a chapel or cathedral, thanks to its arched ceiling, and has been given the nickname 'the carpenter's cave' due to the way the ridges in the ceiling bring to mind wooden beams.

Alongside the artistry and reverence for religious figures displayed in these caves and others – the carvings telling the story of the goddess Parvati in Rameshwar temple in Cave 21, the delicately carved detail of the 24 Jinas depicted in the Jain monuments from Caves 30-34, or the ten avatars of Vishnu between the columns of The Dashavatara in Cave 15 – these caves give a fascinating insight into the

LOCATION Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1983

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (iii), (vi)

TOP TIP Buses from Aurangabad to the Ellora caves are regular, leaving every half an hour from the central bus station.

life of the people that worshiped here. Some of these caves were constructed for people to live in, featuring living areas, sleeping quarters, kitchens, and refectories. To be reminded that this ancient site was once bustling with people only adds to its aura.

The Ellora caves are an astonishing artistic and technological achievement, as well as a beautiful monument to religious tolerance.

GREAT BARRIER REEF

AUSTRALIA'S NATURAL WONDER IS EQUALLY STUNNING FROM ABOVE AND BELOW THE WATER

The Great Barrier Reef is the largest living structure on the planet, and the only one visible from space. It stretches over 2,300 kilometres (1,429 miles) off the coast of Queensland, Australia, from Cairns up to the Daintree rainforest, and is made up of 3,000 coral reefs and hundreds of islands. Legendary in its reputation, this wonder of the natural world attracts more than 1.5 million visitors a year.

There's such a huge diversity of marine species in and around the Great Barrier Reef that it was named a World Heritage Site in 1981 for its scientific significance. Whether you're viewing it from a glass-bottomed

boat or through a snorkel, the life on the reef is breathtaking. 2,000 species of fish dart between bright anemones and lurk on the seabed; sharks drift over the branching coral; and manta rays glide serenely through the water. Seabirds like pelicans fly overhead, and lucky travellers can spot dolphins and whales leaping from the waves.

Experienced divers are spoilt for choice, with seemingly endless reef to explore. The Yongala, a steamer sunk by a cyclone in 1911, now lies 28 metres (92 feet) below the surface and is considered one of the best wreck dives in the world. Those not so used to life in a wetsuit needn't feel left out – snorkeling in the

LOCATION Australia

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1981

TYPE OF SITE Natural

CRITERIA (vii), (viii), (ix), (x)

TOP TIP Pack plenty of suncream and a pair of sunglasses, and only swim where you're told it's safe to do so.

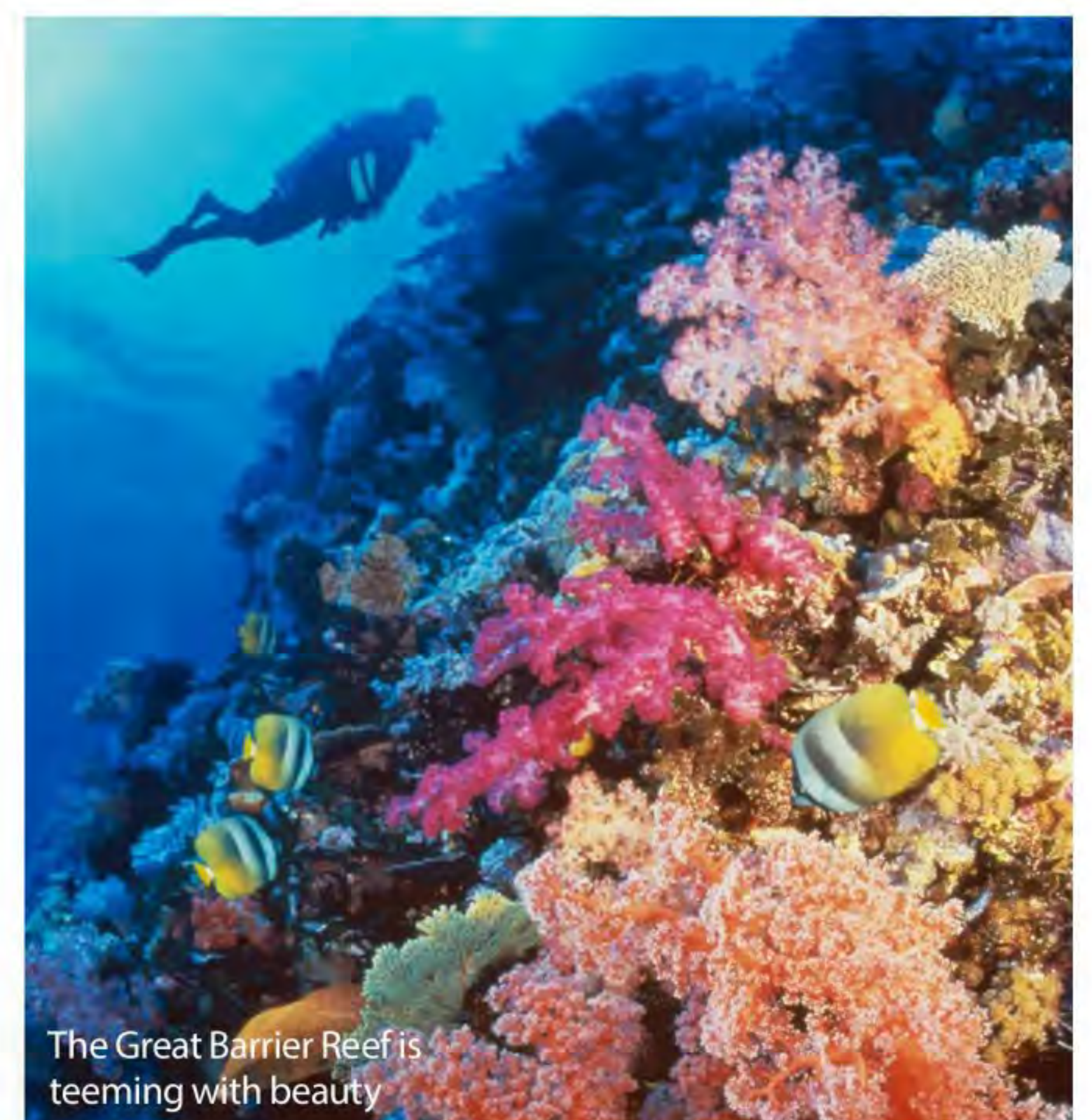
An aerial view of coral, Heart Reef and the turquoise waters at Hardy Reef



crystal-clear waters is an exhilarating activity available to anyone comfortable in the water. Even visitors happier just looking at the water can experience the reef close up; ReefHQ is the largest living reef aquarium on the planet, with the coral ecosystem replicated on land.

Of course, the best way to see the whole reef is from the air. Helicopters and light aircraft leave from Cairns and Airlie Beach airports to offer breathtaking views of the whole coast. For the daredevils, there's the opportunity to leave the comfort of the plane and skydive over the Whitsunday Islands.

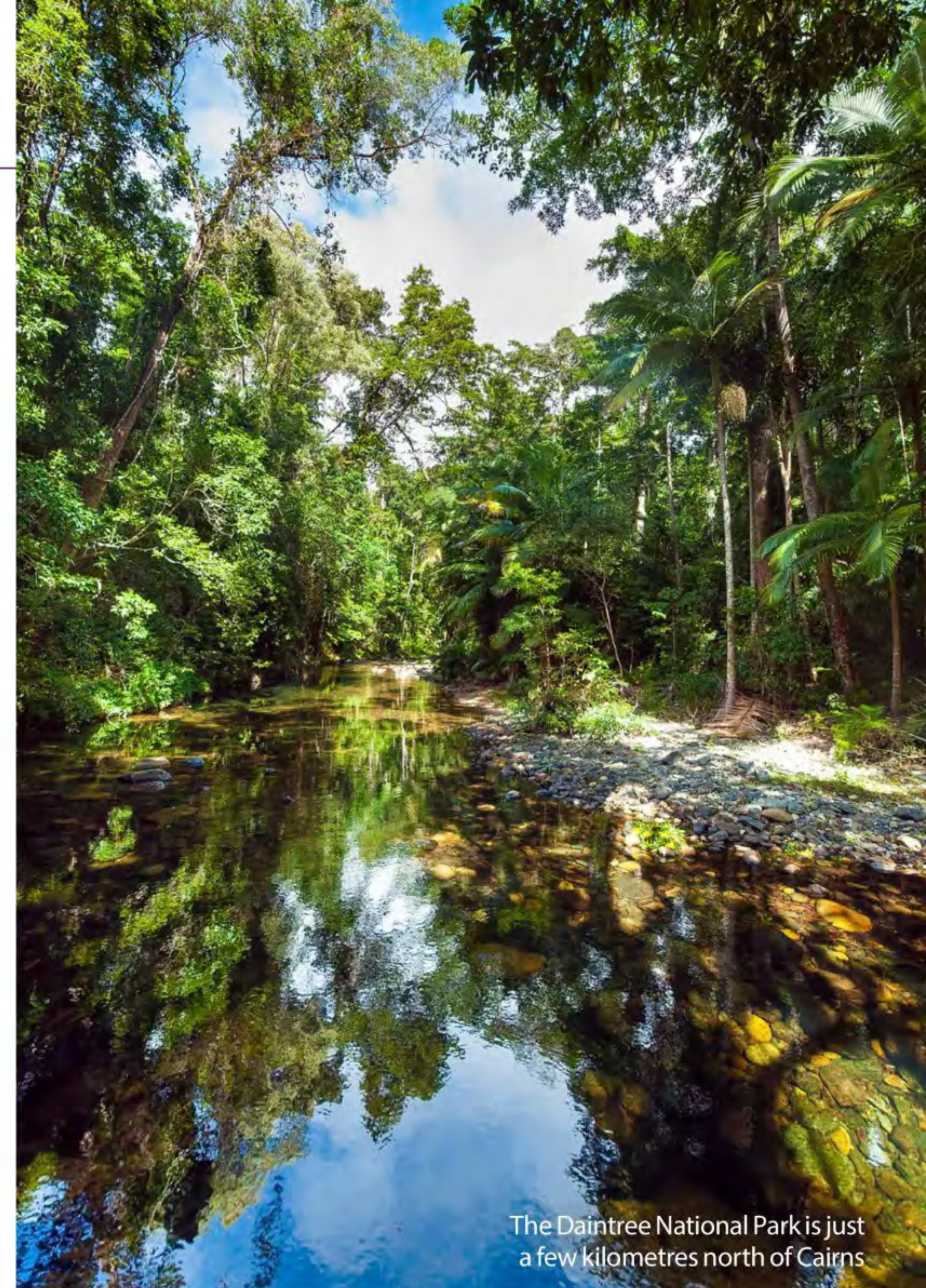
The Whitsundays, 74 idyllic islands scattered across the turquoise water of the reef, are high on the to-do lists of many visitors. Landing at the Whitsunday Coast airport near Proserpine,



The Great Barrier Reef is teeming with beauty



Go snorkelling or diving for a chance to see turtles and more



The Daintree National Park is just a few kilometres north of Cairns



SEE IT UP CLOSE

Diving and snorkelling in the waters of the Great Barrier Reef are wonderful experiences for both the seasoned explorer and those wanting to try it for the first time, and most tour operators will accommodate for both. If you're concerned about swimming through crowded water, don't worry – the reef is vast, and there are many locations for exploring what lies beneath, so you won't be swimming shoulder to shoulder with a stranger.

The water has comfortable temperatures all year round, but what you will see will vary throughout the year. For example, between June and November you have a greater chance of spotting whales.

If you are an experienced scuba diver and want to try something different, you should look into exploring the SS Yongala, a passenger ship that sank in 1911. Some operators may briefly pass by this, but there are others that offer a tour of the wreckage, so make sure you find the best tour operator to suit your needs.

“THE BEST WAY TO SEE THE WHOLE REEF IS FROM THE AIR”

It's a 25-minute bus journey to Airlie Beach. This resort town is a hive of activity with beaches, swimming areas, nightclubs and a marina full of boats ready to set sail for tours of the islands. Tours can last a few hours or several days depending on your schedule and budget; overnight visitors can camp, stay in island lodges or let the waves send them to sleep in the cabin of a boat.

When you feel ready for a break from island-hopping and golden beaches, head inland to the Daintree Rainforest. Entering the dense jungle, teeming with unusual creatures and strange sounds, is like stepping into another world. It's home to some of Australia's unique animals such as possums, tree kangaroos and forest dragons. Tread quietly and you might even catch a glimpse of the world's third largest bird, the dinosaur-like cassowary.

If dangerous birds aren't your thing, Conway National Park behind Airlie Beach plays host to daintier birds like cockatoos and kingfishers. Rent some mountain bikes and you can fly through the rainforest alongside them.

Combining water and wilderness, Heron Island is a protected Marine National Park and the perfect place to spend a quiet few days soaking up the sun and marvelling at the nature. Plan a trip between November and March and you'll be able to watch turtles laying eggs and hatching on the beach.

The Great Barrier Reef sits at the top of millions of bucket lists, and with good reason. In case any more persuasion is needed, just remember this: Sir David Attenborough himself said that it was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.



From Airlie Beach, you can catch a boat to the reef

The perfect cone volcano of Ngauruhoe sits south of Lake Taupo, just after a winter sunset



©Getty Images

TONGARIRO NATIONAL PARK

ADVENTURE AWAITS IN NEW ZEALAND'S DRAMATIC VOLCANIC LANDSCAPE, SHAPED BY MAORI LEGEND

Tongariro is New Zealand's oldest national park and in 1993, it was also the first World Heritage Site to be valued for having cultural landscapes as well as natural ones. The spectacular mountainous regions in the park are protected for their religious and cultural significance to the Māori people, who have lived in harmony with the environment for centuries. There are a number of Māori religious sites within the park and many of the park's summits are sacred (tapu in Māori). According to Māori belief, these mountains were once gods and warriors.

Visit Tongariro, and you'll be able to witness these legendary volcanic landscapes first-hand, as well as diverse river ecosystems and wildlife. There are three active volcanoes on the site: Mount Tongariro, Mount Ngauruhoe and Mount Ruapehu. Tongariro is a fascinating complex of cones and craters formed by eruptions from the last 275,000 years. Keen skiers might want to head to Ruapehu, as it sports majestic slopes and two of the largest ski areas in New

Zealand – Whakapapa and Turoa. To enjoy the unsurpassed views without skiing, it's possible to take a chairlift ride or book a tour with an experienced local alpine guide.

Ngauruhoe is a stratovolcano (a cone-shaped volcano) that's well-traversed by hikers and climbers, and again, it offers stunning panoramic views at higher altitudes. Ngauruhoe is the country's most active volcano, and it was used as Mount Doom in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, so you'll likely recognise sections if you're a fan of the films.

Tongariro is listed as a cultural site, but it's a heritage site to keep adventurers busy, whether the activity in question is mountain bike hire, kayaking along the Tongariro River rapids, or even mountain air volcanic flights taking in the central plateau landscape.

A popular day hike across the park is The Tongariro Alpine Crossing trail, a 19.4-kilometre (12-mile) trek across Tongariro's volcanic alpine landscape. The hike passes Emerald Lakes, boiling mud pools, and ends at the active Red

LOCATION New Zealand

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1990

TYPE OF SITE Mixed

CRITERIA (vi), (vii), (viii)

TOP TIP Download the Tongariro Alpine Crossing smartphone app ahead of your visit.

Crater, but it's only recommended between November to April, unless you've got alpine skills and kit for ice trekking.

Whether you want to experience Tongariro's spiritual associations or its volcanic features, your safety and enjoyment will be dependent on changing weather conditions. It's therefore essential to find out about the relevant information before your trip.

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

A BUILDING THAT PUTS ON A GREAT PERFORMANCE INSIDE AND OUT

Think of Australia's most populous and famous city and the image of the Sydney Opera House will immediately spring into most people's minds. With its sail-like roof made up of 2,194 pre-cast concrete sections and a prime, picturesque position on the city's former harbour island of Bennelong Point, this is a dazzling building that nevertheless very nearly didn't get built.

When a design competition was launched in 1955, there were 233 entrants drawn from 32 countries. Among them was a nature-inspired effort based on the wings of birds, shells, clouds and palm trees by little known Danish architect Jørn Utzon. Three of the four judges didn't like it, however, and were ready to cast it aside in favour of something else. But the design was described as "genius" by US architect Eero Saarinen and so construction began in 1959.

It took 14 years to build (ten years longer than expected) but it was finally opened in 1973 by Queen Elizabeth II. By then, the cost had spiralled from an estimated AUS\$7 million to AUS\$102 million but it was a sight to behold

– an expressionist modernism structure 185 metres (607 foot) long and 120 metres (394 foot) wide with a roof made of interlocking shells covered in a million tiles reaching a point 67 metres (220 foot) above sea level. The shells were inspired by the peeling of an orange.

Utzon placed a high vaulted Concert Hall at the heart of his creation, seating 2,679 people. It was also made to feel like a cathedral for music with panels made from white birch timber and a great feeling of space. In 2020, the hall underwent a AUS\$150 million upgrade to improve access and grant it better acoustics (they've been a problem since it opened). Work is expected to be completed in 2021, but you can still visit the other six venues inside the building in the meantime, including the Joan Sutherland Theatre with its capacity of 1,507.

When the Concert Hall flings open its doors again in time for the 2022 season, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra will once more take to its impressive stage. Visitors will also have the opportunity of enjoying the world's largest mechanical grand organ, with its 10,244 pipes

LOCATION Sydney, Australia

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 2007

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i)

TOP TIP The backstage tour entails a lot of walking and more than 300 steps.

– never let it be said that this building doesn't strike a chord.

Indeed, UNESCO calls it a "great urban sculpture set in a remarkable waterscape" and it praises its enduring influence on architecture. It's also very popular. Each year, about 10.9 million people visit the site, many enjoying more than 3,000 events held there annually. Of those, 350,000 people take a guided tour to learn about how it was built. It's definitely something to shout about from the rooftops.



ULURU-KATA TJUTA

MARVEL AT THE MASSIVE MONOLITH AND ROCKY DOMES THAT RISE FROM THE AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK



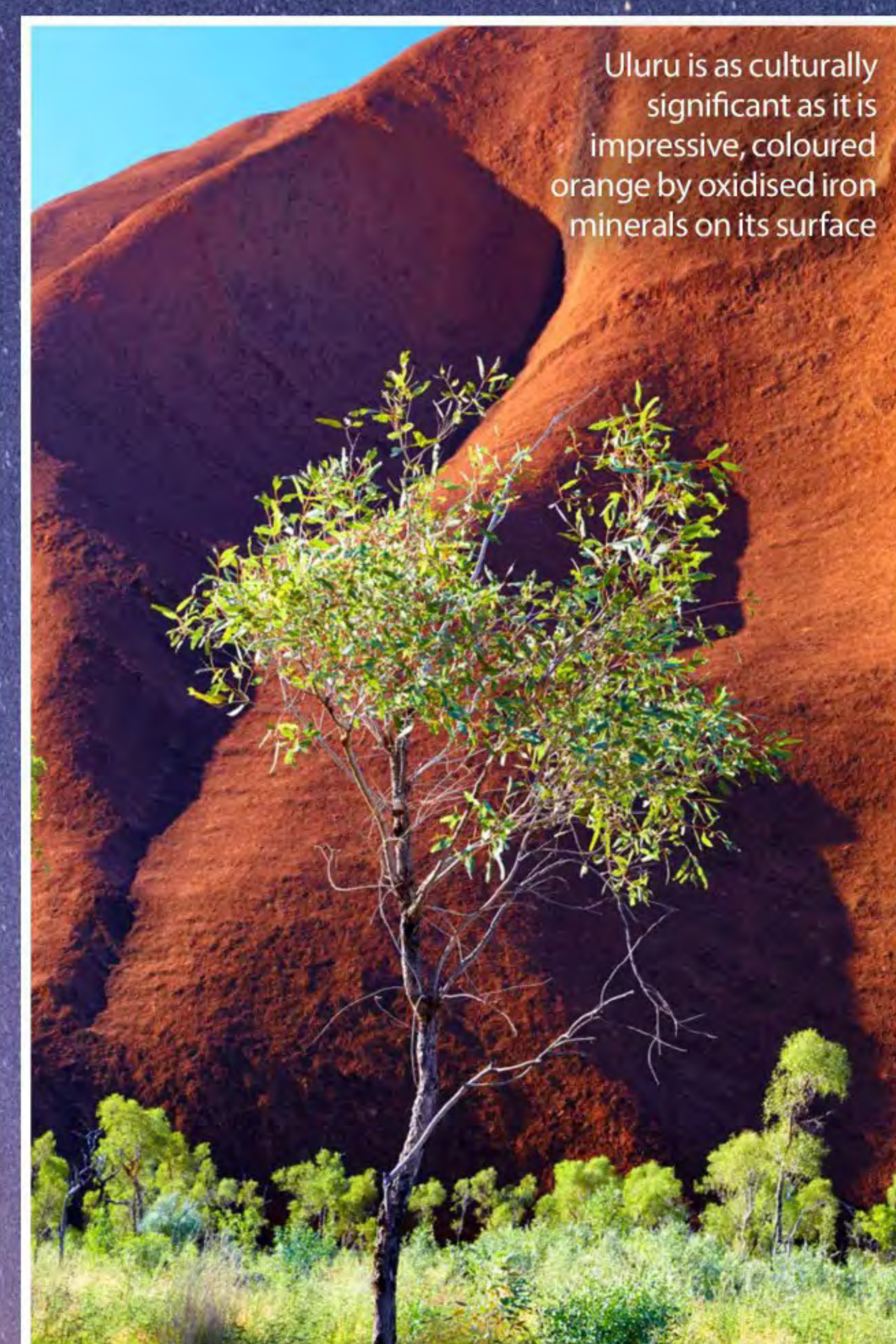
LOCATION | Australia

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION | 1987

TYPE OF SITE | Mixed

CRITERIA | (v), (vi), (vii), (viii)

TOP TIP | The best time to view the rocks is at sunset, when you can catch them glowing red.



Watch the magnificent Uluru monolith shift its hue to a vibrant red as the sun is setting

Explore the incredible wilderness of Kata Tjuta by hiking around its base



“HIKING ROUTES PASS BY ROCK ART, SOARING CREVICES AND ASTONISHING GEOLOGICAL FEATURES”



Take a moment to stand back and take stock at the size and shape of these giant monoliths, and you may feel a spiritual presence

SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

Believed to have been created at the beginning of time by ancestral beings, Uluru-Kata Tjuta has been home to Aboriginal people for roughly 30,000 years. The park is more than just a tourist attraction for travellers, it's a spiritual home for the Anangu people. These huge rock formations play a prominent part in Australian history, when the Australian Parks authority handed back ownership of the park to the Anangu people in October 1985. Travelling here is not complete without learning about bush tucker, rock art and the Tjukurpa creation stories that tell how everything here came to be.

Located roughly 460 kilometres (285 miles) from the town of Alice Springs in the heart of Australia's Red Centre, Uluru-Kata Tjuta is a vast, semi-arid desert comprising two impressive rock formations. The first of these, Uluru (also known as Ayers Rock), is a huge, dome-shaped sandstone monolith standing 360 metres (1,181 feet) above sea level – taller than the Eiffel Tower – and is made up of valleys, caves, ridges, plunge pools and tall grooves. The second formation, Kata Tjuta (or 'many heads', as its name translates), is a formation comprising of 36 rocks that spread out across the vast desert outback.

To get a true sense of the history and culture surrounding these massive rock formations, free guided walks, lasting approximately one and a half hours, come highly recommended. Rangers regale stories of the Mala people and their traditions and how the Anangu culture thrived around the park. Grab a visitor's map and complete the full three-and-a-half-hour circuit of Uluru's base around a 10.6-kilometre (6.5-mile) loop. This is the ideal way to experience and photograph the natural beauty of this giant monolith. A number of hiking routes – varying in difficulty and length – surround the rock formation,

passing by rock art, soaring crevices and astonishing geological features.

A 45-minute drive west of Uluru are the domed rock formations of Kata Tjuta. It's well worth grabbing a panoramic glimpse of Kata Tjuta from the Dune Viewing area located just a short drive away from the formation before heading further in to explore. Access to most areas at Kata Tjuta is restricted, but there are two recommended hiking routes when visiting these incredible domes, starting with the 2.6-kilometre (1.6-mile) Walpa Gorge hike. A rocky path reveals a plethora of plant and animal life. The other walks are combined within the Valley of the Winds, comprising tracks heading down valleys and creek beds and onto lookout points that'll simply take your breath away. During the midday heat, find some shade to cool down before heading back out in the late afternoon sun to catch the sunset lighting up the formations and turning them a glorious red hue.

Spend a couple of days exploring what's on offer in Uluru-Kata Tjuta, allocating a day to each formation. Hotels are available to book at the nearby Ayers Rock Resort, so staying longer here will give you a greater insight into the culture and historical value of the park.

NAN MADOL

EXPLORE THE ENIGMATIC ARTIFICIAL ISLAND CITY IN A PACIFIC PARADISE

LOCATION Federated States of Micronesia

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 2016

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (i), (iii), (iv), (vi)

TOP TIP Be prepared to get wet – you may need to wade through water depending on the tide.

Sorcerer twins Olisihpa and Olosohpa thought that Temwen Island – just off the bigger island of Pohnpei, now part of the Federated States of Micronesia – was the perfect location for an altar to worship the god of agriculture. In order to build their temple, the duo set about levitating huge stones with the aid of a dragon.

The legend might be a bit fanciful, but the truth is that we don't know a huge amount about how or why the city on a coral reef was built. Pohnpei has evidence of human habitation since the 1st century CE, but construction of the artificial islets in the shallow water began sometime around the 8th century. At its peak, 92 islets over an area measuring 1,500 metres by 500 metres (4,920 by 1,640 feet) contained stone buildings and structures, all enclosed by a stone wall and separated by a network of canals. Naturally pentagonal and hexagonal columns of black basalt up to six metres (20 feet) long were used to build walls and elevated platforms upon which thatched structures sat.

The effort that must have gone into the creation of Nan Madol proves that it was an important site and archaeologists think that the ruling Saudeleur Dynasty used it as their seat of power. The rulers forced local chieftains to leave their home villages and move to the city where their activities could be more closely observed. It was a strategy that Louis XIV used when he built the Palace of Versailles to keep an eye on his power-hungry nobles, only the Saudeleurs were at it when Notre Dame was still being built.

Most of the islets were used for housing, although there were specific islets for canoe construction, coconut oil production and food preparation. With no source of fresh water or ability to grow food, all supplies had

to be transported by boat – it was quite an endeavour to feed Nan Madol's 1,000 residents when the whole population of Pohnpei barely reached 25,000. The islets also housed a mortuary sector, including royal tombs with seven-metre (23-feet) high walls surrounding the tomb enclosure.

Nan Madol was abandoned after the Saudeleurs were overthrown in the 16th century and left to be reclaimed by the jungle. This archaeological enigma poses many unanswered questions, but there is little doubt that what the Saudeleurs originally called the Reef of Heaven is well worth a visit.

The canal network gave Nan Madol its modern name, meaning "within the intervals"



The Royal Exhibition Building was the first building in Australia to be granted UNESCO World Heritage Site status



ROYAL EXHIBITION BUILDING

THE UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE THAT WAS ALMOST REPLACED BY A BLOCK OF OFFICES

You'd be forgiven for thinking this impressive colonial-era structure is in a part of London you've overlooked. But in fact the Royal Exhibition Building is located in Melbourne, Australia, which was part of the British Empire when commissioned in 1879. It was built as a grand statement of wealth, prosperity, and ambition following the 1850s gold rush that had enriched the state. What resulted was a building 150-metres (492-feet) long, sitting in grounds encompassing manicured gardens and fountains. It remains one of the few 19th century exhibition buildings that are still operational today.

Walk inside and you cannot help but be staggered by the sheer size of the exhibition space – this is the Great Hall that remains largely in original condition. Huge 20-metre (65-feet) archways extend in front, to the right and left of you. The majestic dome, modelled on Brunelleschi's dome on the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence, rises to 66

metres (216 feet), channelling in beams of natural light, no doubt intended to give a sense of grandeur. The timber structures that keep the dome up have today been restored with the rich ornamental painting it would have proudly presented back in the 1880s.

Decorating the building are several miniature reliefs and allegorical murals. Look out for the mural in the main hall – it depicts six women each holding a shield bearing the emblem of one of the six states of Australia, representing the formation of the commonwealth of Australia.

The prestige of the building was such that it was chosen, instead of Sydney, to be the location to celebrate 100 years of European settlement in 1888, and housed the first parliament of independent Australia in 1901. During the 1918-20 global influenza outbreak, it became a hospital and an air-force training school during World War II. After this it fell into disuse and decades of decay left locals to label it 'The White Elephant', so in 1948, Melbourne

LOCATION Melbourne, Australia

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 2004

TYPE OF SITE Cultural

CRITERIA (ii)

TOP TIP Tours of the building take place when it's not in use for events and exhibitions.

City Council presented a proposal for its demolition – and was defeated by one vote. Since then the building has seen numerous concerts, royal visits, and even hosted the wrestling, weightlifting and basketball matches during the 1958 Melbourne Olympics.

Today the building is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and to think it was almost replaced by a block of offices!

FRASER ISLAND



SET ALONGSIDE AUSTRALIA'S QUEENSLAND COAST IS A MYSTERIOUS ISLAND, FIERCELY UNIQUE AND WILD

Part of the Great Sandy National Park, Fraser Island is home to the world's oldest dunes. However, this is no typical subtropical paradise. Stretching 123 kilometres (76 miles) long and 22 kilometres (14 miles) wide, at 184,000 hectares (454,674 acres), Fraser Island is the largest sand island in the world. More than that, dressed in luscious layers of foliage, the UNESCO World Heritage Site is the planet's only sand island to boast a rainforest. It is an island in motion, an ever-evolving snapshot of nature at its most innovative and raw.

Fraser Island sits along the Fraser Coast, 300 kilometres (186 miles) north of Brisbane. While road-trippers board the Manta Ray Barge from Inskip Point, ramblers often prefer to take the more leisurely 50-minute Fraser Island Barge, from River Heads, 20 minutes south of Hervey Bay. Truly daring souls may even opt for the scenic, albeit tiny, Air Fraser Island plane.

No matter how it is reached, a good starting point is to stock up on supplies at the settlements of Eurong, Happy Valley, Cathedrals or Orchid Beach – though visitors

are advised to bring medical kits and water with them when they visit.

From here, Fraser Island, known by its aboriginal name of K'gari, is best enjoyed aboard a four-wheel drive (or 4WD), throttling along its 250-kilometre (155-mile) shoreline, rocky roads and looming rainforests. However, the island's great lure is as a socket to connect to nature – and it could be argued that the only way to truly do so is the 90-kilometre (56-mile), six-day Fraser Island Great Walk, from the northeastern Happy Valley to the southeastern Dilli Village – with plenty of camping breaks along the way. For casual walkers, the journey can also be enjoyed in chunks – ranging from a few hours to an overnight trek.

Along the way, the island unveils its hidden gems, not so much diamonds in the rough, as perpetual masterpieces, forever in perfection. The island's most immediately staggering feature is its rainforest. Across Pile Valley, which has survived some serious deforestation, giant satinay trees stretch straight towards the clear blue sky, alongside the brush box, spreading outwards like bursts of green clouds. They are joined by thin piccabeen palms with

outstretched feathery fronds, and cherry satinash, sprouting a popular 'bush food', along with the resilient blush satinash, abloom with fluffy, white flowers. Elsewhere, Wanggoolba Creek is shaded beneath a walkway of rare king ferns, holding their leaning fronds up using water pressure.

Behind the northeastern lookout of Waddy Point, the subtropical rainforest is characterised by the scribbly gum – a light-coloured eucalyptus tree, with dark scribbles drawn up by the scribbly moth's larvae. These are kept company by the red bloodwood, an evergreen reaching heights of 35 metres (115 feet), oozing with an essential oil much-coveted in aboriginal herbal medicine. While Fraser Island's choppy seas are considered unsafe for swimming, the nearby Champagne Pools create a natural set of swimming holes along the shoreline. Looking east towards the Coral Sea, it is the only place one can enjoy the island's saltwater – especially during low-tide, when the pools are lapped only by soft waves, hauling in the occasional fish.

One of the island's more curious wonders is its 40 kilometres (25 miles) of coloured

Fraser Island, the world's only sand island to host a rainforest, is characterised by towering satinay, brush box and other sub-tropical trees

LOCATION Australia

YEAR OF INSCRIPTION 1992

TYPE OF SITE Natural

CRITERIA (vii), (viii), (ix)

TOP TIP If faced with a dingo, keep still and cross your arms over your chest. Then, facing the dingo, slowly walk backwards.

sandy cliffs. Known as The Pinnacles, they are believed by the indigenous Butchulla people to have been created by the Rainbow Serpent. Heading south towards Eli Creek, 72 shades of sand dance from red to yellow, ushering in the wreck of the SS Maheno – an early turbine-driven steamer, which was swept away in 1935 while being dragged to Japan. It is just one of 23 ships to have been wrecked against Fraser Island between 1856 and 1935 – even after the construction of the island's northern Sandy Cape Lighthouse in 1870.

Further afield, Hammerstone Sandblow, one of the island's large, ever-shifting dunes, leads into Lake Wabby. The island's deepest lake is also an anomaly – both technically a window lake, which sits beneath water level, and a barrage lake – formed when the Hammerstone created a natural dam against a creek. It is also the island's only lake that supports aquatic life, but in the next century will most likely be swallowed by the dune that created it.

Altogether, the island's lakes are exceptional in size, diversity and age. Inland, Fraser's Lake McKenzie splits the rainforest, like an enormous oasis. The perched lake is fed not by groundwater but rainwater, sitting between dunes, atop the silky smooth white silica sand below – which not only filters the water crystal clear, but feels positively delightful beneath treading feet.

Lake Boomanjin is also a bizarre beast. Quieter than its counterparts, at 190 hectares (470 acres), it is both the world's largest perched lake, and the highest, 130 metres (427 feet) above sea level. However, not content to break records, Boomanjin also boasts a surreal gradient of reddish hues – tea tree red, to be precise – an effect created by stripping tannin from the surrounding tea trees.

The island's unusual landscapes have created a fittingly unfamiliar ecosystem, where the purest strain of eastern Australian dingoes call home. Roughly 50 mammals are spread across Fraser Island's rainforests, mangroves, swamps, woodlands, heaths and shorelines. They include the elusive swamp wallaby, which scurries amid the scant grass and the sheepish short-beaked echidna, with its long spines.

Every year, humpback whales migrate from Antarctica to the eastern Australian coast to give birth



“FRASER ISLAND’S MOST IMMEDIATELY STAGGERING FEATURE IS ITS RAINFOREST”

Come evening, visitors can go on an open-air tour of the island's all-night party critters, such as the black-and-white sugar glider, a tiny possum capable of crossing half a football pitch in one flight. The island also counts around 80 types of reptile among its population, including 20 species of snake, 'acid frogs' accustomed to acidic water, and sand and lace monitors, which tend to linger around picnic areas.

Aside from hundreds of bird species, the island is also perfectly positioned for whale-watching excursions, as migrating humpbacks flee the Antarctic to give birth in Australia's warmer waters. The only sight more delightful than humpback whales are humpback whales swimming alongside their calves – a shining example of life at the edge of the world.



Fraser Island is home to the purest strain of dingo in eastern Australia

The self-contained Kingfisher Bay Resort is tucked away on a stunning stretch of shoreline



ACCOMMODATION

There is no one way to experience Fraser Island. The isle offers myriad options to rest your head, from camping beneath the stars to living it up at the Kingfisher Bay Resort. For backpackers and four-wheelers, campgrounds are scattered across the island – though not all of these allow campers to light fires, so packing a portable stove is a must. Luckily, from crockery to sleeping bags, essentials can be hired along with a 4WD. Camping packages even include the cost of permits.

While there are hotels available in Eurong and Happy Valley, none quite match up to Kingfisher Bay Resort, an ecotourist slice of paradise, offering everything from rooms to villas, with views of the sea and lagoons. Meanwhile, the timber Wilderness Lodges embed guests in the shade of gum trees and bush plants. Shared bedrooms strip back the frills, limited to an open-lounge, coin-laundry, pay-phone, kitchenette and a mask of mosquito screens.

101 GREATEST HERITAGE SITES

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